

DOWN WITH EVERYBODY!

DOWN
WITH
GEORGE
MIKE



DOWN WITH EVERYBODY !

A Cautionary Tale for Children over
Twenty-one, and Other Stories

by
GEORGE MIKES

Drawings by David Langdon



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"The question is," said Alice, "whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

LEWIS CARROLL

He could make men laugh or cry, by pronouncing the word *Mesopotamia*.

DAVID GARRICK ON GEORGE WHITEFIELD

By the same Author

HOW TO BE AN ALIEN
HOW TO SCRAPE SKIES
WISDOM FOR OTHERS
MILK AND HONEY
DOWN WITH EVERYBODY!
SHAKESPEARE AND MYSELF
ÜBER ALLES
EIGHT HUMORISTS
LITTLE CABBAGES
ITALY FOR BEGINNERS
EAST IS EAST

*

THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION

PREFACE

THE piece, entitled *Down with Everybody!* was originally written as a radio feature under the title *Sleep Campaign*, and first broadcast in the Hungarian Service of the B.B.C. on October 29, 1950. It was subsequently broadcast in several languages in the European Service.

In the last days of 1950 it was suggested—not by me—that *Sleep Campaign* should be rewritten in narrative form. First I wrote a shorter version for certain Far Eastern and Indian periodicals and then the present one.

I should like to express my thanks to the B.B.C. for having released publication rights. My thanks are also due to the Editors of *The Manchester Guardian*, *Go*, *Fodor's France in 1951*, *Switzerland in 1951*, *The United Nations World* and *Junior* for allowing me to include some pieces in this book. *A Shortage of Dragons*, *Against Children*, *Crying Dolls* and *Dybwad*, as well as *Down with Everybody!* in its present form, have not been published before.

The more observant reader may have noticed that all the stories in this book are illustrated—except the title-piece, *Down with Everybody!* Mr. David Langdon explained to me that he would rather not illustrate this particular story, as he had never been farther east in Europe than Switzerland, and consequently knew nothing about those Central European types which he was supposed to caricature. I must admit that his reasoning dumbfounded me. I had never met an artist or a scientist who refused to deal with a subject or lecture on it just because he happened to know nothing about it. I found his reasoning not only ridiculous, but also in the highest

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degree dangerous. It strikes at the very heart of literature and science. If we are not to deal with subjects which we know nothing about, then we condemn modern art and science to almost total extinction.

Finally, I must say a word about reasons for republishing certain pieces in book form. My action has the usual explanation, rarely said, but often implied in such prefaces. I was all against it. But my publishers, readers and millions of admirers begged and besought me to republish these little pieces and give them in a more permanent form to the world. Still, I was adamant. The clamour, however, became more and more vociferous and passionate day by day. When demonstrations under my window grew in fierceness and violence and when the King's Peace was seriously threatened, I gave in. Perhaps I was too weak. Perhaps I ought to have risked civil war. I do not really know.

G.M.

May, 1951.

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PART ONE

Down with Everybody!

CHAPTER I

THE FATEFUL QUESTION

THE story, related in these pages, is the story of the famous Sleep Campaign. Of course, to-day we know it only too well—its conferences, meetings and committees; its declared aims and slogans, its vociferous battle-cries. We all know of that world-shattering campaign for peaceful sleep, sweet dreams and idyllic tranquillity. We think of it and rage with anger or shiver with fear.

Few of us know, however, of the—well, I should not say peaceful but certainly inconspicuous circumstances in which the movement was born in Yocketown, capital of Servilia, in Eastern Europe. And few of us know that at first it almost grew in the wrong direction.

Well, here is the full story.

* * *

For one hopeful moment the class thought it was all over. They put their newspapers away and some of them stood up and started walking towards the door.

“One minute, Comrades, one minute . . .” said Comrade Vlatsek.

They all sat down and opened up the newspapers again. Julius Molnar sighed briefly but then, on second thoughts, he started coughing as if the sigh had been caused by an irritation of the throat, a genuine preliminary to the coughing attack.

Comrade Vlatsek remained standing. He threw a glance at the front page leading article of *The Free Gaol*, the Party organ, and went on with his lecture.

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"To-day's leading article makes it quite clear," he said, "that this is the very last opportunity for the enemy and for the wavering elements to give up those subversive and dangerous activities and thoughts which we inherited from the old Capitalist régimes, before we were liberated by the Red Army."

"Most unfortunately," said a female voice.

"What was that?" asked Comrade Vlatsek in an icy tone.

There was deadly silence in the room. Nobody moved.

"What was that?" Comrade Vlatsek repeated the question.

Mrs. Molnar stood up.

"I mean . . . I say . . . I say . . . I mean, I said that unfortunately too many subversive and dangerous thoughts survive from those times."

Comrade Vlatsek nodded.

"You are quite right. Sit down, Mrs. Molnar. All these ideas and prejudices must now finally disappear. We all know that to-day the country belongs to us, so we are working and building for ourselves. It is true that we get less wages than before but it is clear, isn't it, that this is to our best advantage. As everything belongs to us, in this way we are saving substantial sums for ourselves. Consequently the less we get the more we have. If we get very little, we are prosperous; if we get nothing at all, we are positively rich. And mind you, this is real wealth! Real wealth as opposed to Capitalist wealth."

"Down with Capitalism!" shouted Torony, the stakhanovite coal-man.

Vlatsek threw a friendly glance at Torony.

"I am glad that the hero of the proletariat agrees with me. Or at least hope that Comrade Torony is going to prove the hero on Saturday." Then he continued:

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"Only reactionaries and foreign spies are unable, or rather unwilling, to see that even if we starve, it is to our own good. Once we have starved we do not go on eating up our own food supplies."

"Hear, hear! That's quite clear. That's absolutely true," agreed Barna, the People's Poet.

"Starving is, in fact, well-being. It is real well-being, as opposed to Capitalist well-being," added Comrade Vlatsek.

The class murmured approval.

"It is obvious that even if we are worked to death, it is to our own advantage. As we live only for ourselves, it follows that we also die only for ourselves."

"Down with Capitalism!" bellowed Torony, the stakhanovite coal-man once again.

Comrade Vlatsek re-opened the newspaper before him.

"There is only one final point," he said, "emerging from the leader in to-day's *Free Gaol*. How can we tell reactionaries and foreign spies?"

Barna raised his hand.

"Yes, Comrade Barna."

Barna stood up and spoke in a strong, clear voice.

"A reactionary and a foreign spy is a man who is not pleased when his wages are cut or when he is asked to work more for the same wages and who is not pleased to starve."

"Very good, Comrade Barna, very good indeed." He stopped for a moment and then added: "To-morrow I shall ask you further questions about real wealth and real well-being."

Now, at last, the lesson was over, they thought. They had no reason to believe that to-day was going to be any different from other days. When they finished their daily work in the factories and offices at seven o'clock, they

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often had to rush to this Party seminary in 13 Lysenko Street in order to listen to Comrade Vlatsek read out once again the leading article of *The Free Gaol* and make it even slightly more obscure with his explanations. Afterwards they all asked questions. Everybody was allowed, indeed encouraged, to express freely the opposite of what he believed and utter without fear or hindrance the views of *The Free Gaol* on every subject under the sun. To-morrow, the discussion would again be on real wealth and real well-being. They were all familiar with the whole complex reasoning. Wealth meant the possession of money and wordly goods; real wealth meant the complete lack of them. Well-being meant comfort; real well-being, starvation. Freedom of speech meant that you were allowed to say whatever you had in your mind; real freedom of speech did not entail even the right to keep your mouth shut: it meant the compulsory repetition of the ideas of *The Free Gaol*. Democracy meant the rule of the majority; real democracy meant the tyranny of the few. Elections meant the right to chose between two or more candidates; real elections meant the right to choose between one. Still, they were all enthusiastic. They were all enthusiastically in favour of keeping their jobs and earning some money for themselves and their families so they all accepted these teachings. One day was like another—they thought. Well, to-morrow it would again be about real wealth and real well-being.

In all this they were, however, making two mistakes. They could not go home yet; and this day was not like any other because it was now that Julius Molnar was to ask the fatal question. It was a question on a trivial and petty subject—so it seemed at first. But it was from this tiny seed that the tree grew, the tree which to-day throws its shadow upon the whole world.

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"Are there any questions you wish to ask?" asked Comrade Vlatsek. "Private matters, I mean."

A short pause followed.

"I've been told by the Central Office of the Party," Comrade Vlatsek went on, "that I should encourage you to bring up your personal problems. Do not think that the Party is disinterested in your private affairs."

"We have never laboured under this delusion," said Balint, the former Social Democrat.

"Well, then . . . we are here to help."

An excited conversation in undertones had arisen between Mr. and Mrs. Molnar. "Come on, Julius. What did I tell you?" whispered Mrs. Molnar.

"No, no, leave me alone, Yolanda," whispered Julius Molnar angrily.

"What is this all about?" enquired Vlatsek.

"Nothing, Comrade Vlatsek. . . . This is a purely private matter," muttered Molnar.

"That is what I want to hear. I hope you have nothing to hide, Comrade Molnar?" added Vlatsek significantly.

"Oh, no . . . of course not. But it is such a trifle," Molnar repeated stubbornly.

"Come, now, I am here to help you."

"Out with it, Julius," whispered Mrs. Molnar.

"Don't pester me, Yolanda."

"I want to know what this is all about," repeated Comrade Vlatsek in an icy tone.

"Well . . . but it is really quite unimportant. . . . It is of no consequence."

"What is it?" said Vlatsek for the third time, sternly. Molnar sighed.

"If I must. . . . Well, Comrade Vlatsek, I cannot sleep."

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"You cannot do what? "

"I cannot sleep."

Vlatsek frowned.

"Are you trying to be funny, Comrade Molnar? We are in a Party Seminary, aren't we? Why should you want to sleep here? "

Julius Molnar threw an angry glance at his wife.

"You misunderstand me, Comrade Vlatsek. It is not here I cannot sleep. In fact, if I can sleep anywhere, it is here. I cannot sleep at home. During the night."

There it was, the private problem and Vlatsek did not know what to say. He asked Molnar whether he had tried lying in bed, closing his eyes and just waiting. Mrs. Molnar admitted that this was a most original and helpful idea but they had tried it. And tried it without success. And he had tried other things, too. He had tried—she said—to count to a thousand. But he had counted up to a hundred thousand and was still awake. They had tried doctors and sedatives; they had tried port wine and sleeping tablets. Nothing had been of any use. Julius could not sleep.

Comrade Vlatsek expressed his sympathy and understanding. This was very sad, very sad indeed, he repeated, shaking his head. He repeated this over and over again and was deeply worried. It was quite impossible, he thought, that he in his capacity of Party Seminary Instructor should find himself confronted with a problem which he could not solve. No, that just would not do. Suddenly a brilliant idea struck him.

"But why do you want to sleep, Comrade Molnar? " he asked.

"Why do I want to sleep? " Molnar repeated the question stupidly.

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"Why does Julius want to sleep?" asked Mrs. Molnar, too.

"That's what I said," declared Vlatsek in an imperious tone, feeling that he was gaining the upper hand again. "Why do you want to sleep? In our age we do not want people to sleep. Our Party members should be fully awake all the time. Ours is the time to be wide awake in our glorious People's Democracy. Even the darkest reactionaries, traitors and imperialist spies know how to sleep. A proud worker does not sleep. The country belongs to him. He is awake for his own sake."

Vlatsek's face became red during this oration. He had solved the problem in a correct way ('Correct' was another favourite term of the Party, just as 'real' was.) One leading principle of the Party's moral code was: 'Whenever in difficulty, find a scapegoat.'

Barna, the People's Poet shouted approval; Balint, the former Social Democrat raised his eyes, looked at Vlatsek and muttered: "Well spoken." Toch, the Conscientious Intellectual remarked: "I wonder." Luckily, no one heard him. Julius Molnar hissed to his wife: "You see, Yolanda, it's all your fault." Mrs. Molnar looked away and tried to avoid her husband's eyes. And Torony, the stakhanovite coal-man roared again: "Down with Capitalism!"

The last roar drew Vlatsek's attention to Torony.

"Oh, yes," said Comrade Vlatsek, "I hope that many of us, if not all of us, will go and see Comrade Torony's great fight on Saturday night. Torony is the pride of the proletariat. I hope you will win, Comrade Torony."

Torony was standing now in the door, ready to leave.

"Down with Capitalism," he replied, grinning politely and raised his hat.

People dispersed rather gloomily. They thought they

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had merely witnessed one of the periodical minor skirmishes; one more proof that danger lay where it was least suspected. They thought that unpleasant as the scene was, it would be forgotten by the next day—and certainly by Monday when they would have Torony's great fight to discuss. They had no idea that they had been present at the birth of one of the most significant movements of the century.

CHAPTER II

'DOWN WITH SLEEP'

MRS. MOLNAR looked out of the open window to see what the noise was.

"It's a demonstration again. They are marching in the street shouting slogans."

"Good for them," replied Julius, looking up from his book. He was reading *Alice in Wonderland* in Servilian translation. This was an ugly and repulsive crime because a government decree had recently banned *Alice* along with other subversive books. The government was right, of course, because Alice—and especially the walrus and the carpenter—were clearly determined to overthrow the régime.

He was sorry he had not been able to go and see Torony's great fight the night before. Torony was a nice chap. Not what you would call bright by any standards but full of goodwill, friendliness and eagerness to do the right thing. He was the idol of the masses—and success had certainly gone to his head to some extent, but proud as he was of his own achievements, he admired almost everybody else, too. He admired Barna, the People's Poet first of all. Not that he had ever read any of his poems, but he could not get over the fact that it was at all possible for someone to write in rhyme. For Torony all poets were great poets. Then he admired Vlatsek because he was a great Party man and knew all the answers to all the questions. Molnar, too, came in for his admiration, because Molnar had been a chemist before his little shop was nationalised, which led to Molnar's

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becoming a riveter in a skate factory for export only. (The shop had had to be nationalised because the police found out that he had been selling Capitalist tooth-brushes instead of Democratic ones. Luckily there was no further trouble about this slight deviation and he got a job in a factory.) Anyway, Molnar was a qualified chemist and chemists are very clever people. John Torony was aware that his own greatness lay in other than spiritual fields. He was Servilia's greatest heavy-weight wrestler. He had started life as a coal-heaver, but his success in various international championships—including two European titles—in short succession had secured him an independent livelihood and left him with nothing else to do but to try to remain in training and floor his opponents. When the Party came to power, however, it was made clear to him that no decent proletarian could expect to earn his living by wrestling alone: particularly no amateur. He was promised, therefore, a job which would do justice to his international fame as well as to his intellectual power. So he became a coal-man once again. But not an ordinary coal-man. As he could carry two sacks of coal on his shoulders while some of his colleagues—former lawyers, chartered accountants and philologists—could hardly carry one, he became a stakhanovite and his norms became obligatory on everyone. “If he can do it, why can't you?” as it was reasonably put to the ex-lawyers, chartered accountants and philologists. At first, Torony himself was not delighted to find himself carrying sacks again. But he was highly praised and held up as an example; Vlatsek and other Party people kept talking about his great services to the cause and describing his achievement in such complicated language—full of long, Latin words—that he became convinced at last that carrying sacks of coal was

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something noble. As a stakhanovite he enjoyed great advantages and privileges. Once, for instance, he was invited to attend a lecture in the Academy of Science on “Thermonuclear Reaction in Deuterium and Stellar Reaction”. The lecture was delivered in the language of the Faraway Country, and he thought that was the reason for his not understanding one single word of it. But he sat between a general who used to be a salesman for utility trousers and a salesman for utility trousers who used to be a general, and it was the great day of his life. In the old Capitalist times he had never heard a lecture on “Thermonuclear Reaction in Deuterium” let alone on “Stellar Reaction”, not even in Servilian. He was promised that if he remained a good boy and did not talk too much he would be made a member of parliament with full rights to vote for any government bill, on whatever subject. And, of course, he could still go on with his wrestling. When Molnar had last seen him in the Seminary, he was just about to meet Bolubov the famous wrestling champion of Faraway Country. This event was of major importance and millions were waiting for it in a state of wild excitement. There was to be a running commentary on the air. “Well, what happened?” Molnar asked himself. He put down *Alice in Wonderland* and went to pick up *The Free Gaol*.

At this moment the doorbell rang. Mr. and Mrs. Molnar looked at each other. They were not expecting anybody. An unexpected ring on the doorbell was always a disturbing sound in Servilia and it was particularly disturbing after the events of a few days before. Molnar wrapped up *Alice in Wonderland* in an old number of the Party paper, hid it among a large pile of newspapers—all respectable, orthodox Party literature—sat back in his armchair and opened up the current

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issue of *The Free Gaol*, whereupon his face became as white as death. On the front page, the huge head-lines stared at him: "Down With Sleep!" He threw another uneasy glance at the door, then stood up and took a few steps in the direction of the W.C. Then he suddenly turned back again and carefully arranged *The Free Gaol* on the arm of the chair, so that anybody entering the room should see that he had been engaged in the edifying study of the Creed. Then, somewhat hurriedly, he withdrew to the smallest compartment of his lodging, locking the door behind himself with special care.

Mrs. Molnar opened the front door. There was, after all, no reason for alarm. Toch, the Conscientious Intellectual and Balint, the former Social Democrat were standing before her. It was Sunday morning and between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. every Sunday the people of Servilia had their leisure time. During these two hours they were free to do whatever they liked as long as they spent their time studying the various Party publications and listening to Yoketown radio. On Mondays in the Seminary they were actually required to give an account of their Sunday activities.

Molnar's heart was panting and his throat became dry. "Down With Sleep!" *The Free Gaol* wrote. What was in that article? "Was I wrong, after all?" he asked himself. "Maybe it is wicked to want to sleep. I never thought of it. Until recently it came sort of naturally to me." He gave a sigh of relief when he heard the voices of his friends.

A few minutes later, Toch, the Conscientious Intellectual, and Balint, the former Social Democrat, were busy explaining what had happened. Last Tuesday evening—on the fateful day—Vlatsek told his late-evening class, which followed theirs, Molnar's story. He added

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his own commentary and his philippics against sleep grew ever more bitter and devastating. People in the neighbouring streets and workshops talked a great deal about the new anti-sleep theory. Sleep was obviously a reactionary activity. On Thursday Vlatsek told the story also in the local Party Office and it immediately caught the fancy of the Group Secretary. On the latter's strict and detailed orders, spontaneous anti-sleep demonstrations were organised in the district. The movement spread and the news reached, as all the news always reached, Party Headquarters. Mass demonstrations were organised throughout the country, again on a spontaneous basis. That meant that there was only three days' grace for printing and learning the slogans and preparing the banners. Attendance had been made compulsory for 200,000 people in Yoketown and for large numbers in the provinces.

“Vlatsek means business,” said Mrs. Molnar, somewhat irrelevantly as the whole affair was by now far beyond his control. But, for Mrs. Molnar, Vlatsek was the Party, just as for the new recruit the sergeant is the Army.

Indeed, whatever one might think of Vlatsek, one had to admit that he had been a reliable, faithful and devoted servant of all the régimes in power in the last thirty years. During World War I he was an ardent Servilian nationalist, ready, indeed eager, to shed his blood for King and country. When the republican revolution succeeded, he was the first to hit on the idea of burning an effigy of the exiled King Frederick II in one of the main squares of Yoketown, then still called King Frederick Square. A short-lived Communist revolution took over from the republicans and Vlatsek then acquired the compulsory leather-jacket and helped to round up suspects—mostly

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former nationalists, monarchists and republicans—to be executed by firing squads in Lenin Square (formerly King Frederick Square). The Communist revolt was beaten down and a wild neo-nationalistic régime came to power under General Matyas, and Vlatsek was awarded the Green Cross of Regent Matyas for his distinguished services in the field of rounding up former Communists, republicans and monarchists. He received his Green Cross with 2,514 others in the course of a mass celebration in Regent Matyas Square (formerly Lenin Square, before that, King Frederick Square). In the following decade Regent Matyas's terror régime became much more liberal under West European influence. Both Vlatsek and the Regent himself, in the company of a few hundred thousand others, became the champions of nineteenth-century liberalism. Vlatsek could not pass a Jew in the street without kissing him on the cheek. He made ardent speeches in favour of free speech, exhorted people to speak their minds openly and helped the police in his capacity of informer to round up those who had followed his advice and had spoken their minds openly. Once, one of his victims beat him up in Gladstone Square (formerly Regent Matyas, formerly Lenin, formerly King Frederick Square), but the affair had to be hushed up because his assailant was a Count. A few years later, neighbouring Germany became too strong and Nazism was in vogue. Vlatsek fought bravely against the Red Menace and helped to round up Jews to be shot in Hitler Square, doing a sprinkling of the shooting himself. By the time the Red Menace reached Servilia it was called Universal Blessing. With the help of some witnesses Vlatsek succeeded in proving that he had been personally responsible for the deaths of ten members of the Resistance and Jews. (Ten was the minimum number

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accepted.) And so Vlatsek was immediately appointed a full-time ideological instructor of the Party. In his spare time, he helped the police to round up former Nazis (who had been unable to prove ten killings to their credit) with a few nationalists, monarchists, pro-Matyas elements and liberals thrown in. For his great services he was given the title of “Distinguished Citizen of the People’s Democracy”. An inspiring celebration took place in Leader Square (formerly Hitler, formerly Gladstone, formerly Regent Matyas, formerly Lenin, formerly King Frederick Square). Vlatsek was standing there under the flags and banners, with his 873 fellow-Distinguished Citizens, his head raised, looking the famous foreign hero and conqueror, General Maridoff, in the eye and thinking proudly: “Countries and ideas will perish, but I shall live.”

“Well, is it not a fact,” remarked Toch, the Conscientious Intellectual, “that even Cromwell’s widow asked Charles II for a pension on the grounds that she did not agree with her husband’s politics?”

“I don’t know anything about that,” said Balint, the former Social Democrat, “but it seems to me that Vlatsek keeps asking for pensions and new jobs on the grounds that he has agreed with everybody’s politics since Cromwell.”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“He is a swine,” added Balint and spat on the carpet.

“I don’t quite agree with you, Comrade . . . I mean, Mr. Balint. It is considered a virtue in a soldier to serve whatever régime may be in power, with unquestioning loyalty. Surely, in times like these, we are all soldiers.”

“But a soldier is not supposed to meddle actively in day-to-day politics,” replied Balint and spat on the carpet again.

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“Oh, these are old-fashioned ideas, Mr. Balint. I am amazed that you, as a Marxist, subscribe to them. A soldier must be a politician and serve only one Creed and The Only Party.”

“Very well,” said Balint quietly, “but then your argument about the soldier who must serve all régimes with equal loyalty falls to the ground.”

“You’ve got something there,” said Toch, the Conscientious Intellectual. “I shall think it over.”

“Do by all means,” replied Balint and spat on Toch.

“Don’t keep spitting on the carpet,” said Mr. Molnar to save the situation.

Toch, the Conscientious Intellectual eagerly accepted this way out. He knelt down and started cleaning up a clean bit of the carpet with his handkerchief.

“Is sleeping really wrong?” asked Molnar.

“Rubbish!” exclaimed Balint.

“Well, I don’t know,” muttered Molnar. “Look at the newspaper. I don’t really know. . . .”

“Mr. Molnar is right,” remarked Toch thoughtfully. “It’s a new idea and people are in the habit of rejecting all new ideas—not on their merit but just because they are new. Besides, sleeping is against the interest of the State, consequently it is wrong.”

“Consequently?” roared Balint. “What do you mean—‘consequently’? Yesterday it was all right to sleep. Why should it be a crime to-day?”

“It has been defined as a crime to-day, that’s the whole point,” argued Toch. “All governments create new crimes. There is no such thing as wrong in itself. Even killing is permitted or encouraged in certain circumstances. A deed is wrong because it is prohibited. A few years ago, it was no crime in your famous Western democracies to take any amount of their currency out of

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those countries. To-day it is a crime. And it is a crime because it is prohibited. If taking your own money out of your own country may be declared a crime, I see no reason why sleeping should not be declared a crime, do you?"

"No, now that I have listened to you, I don't, either," said Balint amicably, and he spat on Toch, the Conscientious Intellectual, once again.

Toch opened an umbrella and looked up at the ceiling as if it were raining. A few minutes later he took his leave.

"Dirty rat," remarked Balint contemptuously. "He is leaving the sinking ship."

Molnar was taken aback.

"What do you mean—the sinking ship? Did they mention me by name?"

Balint shook his head.

"No. They didn't. Anyway, don't be afraid. Even if they do, you have a few friends you can count on. I hope, it is needless to say, that I am one. I don't turn with the wind. I am not afraid of them either. I stick to my principles and stick to you, whatever happens."

"Thank you, Balint," said Molnar with tears in his eyes. "Thank you very much."

"That's natural," replied Balint modestly. "It's not for your sake. It's for mine. I could not face myself in the mirror if I deserted a friend in need."

"But what *is* going on?" asked Mrs. Molnar anxiously.

"Let's listen to the radio," suggested Balint.

They switched the radio on.

A great and spontaneous mass demonstration was going on in Leader Square. One speaker after the other—Vlatsek was the third on the list—made fiery speeches against sleep. Sleep was a hateful habit, they declared,

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introduced by the Capitalist spies and it was quite unworthy of the Peoples' Democracies.

"Hear, hear!" shouted two hundred thousand people, and they yawned.

The speaker went on and then the audience shouted, "Down with the Capitalists!" And afterwards: "Down with Sleep!"

Barna, the People's Poet, mounted the rostrum and among wild cheers he recited his new poem, "Against Sleep". It ran thus:

*Down with Sleep, it is the habit
Of Capitalist spies;
A decent worker never sleeps
And never even tries.
Down with Sleep, yes, down with it,
—Just stop, Comrade, and think:—
Our greatest Leader never sleeps,
Not even a wink.
We do not sleep, we don't relax
We never loaf or drift:
(If we don't sleep, we can perform
A twenty-four hour shift.)
Who does not sleep is bold and great,
He's truly good and wise:
And if he dies, how fine to die
In our People's Paradise!*

Barna's poem was received with hilarious delight, boisterous cheers and passionate yawns.

"Down with sleep!" roared the crowd spontaneously three times at a sign from the cheerleader. And then suddenly, on another sign:

"Down with Molnar! Down with Julius Molnar!"

‘DOWN WITH SLEEP’

“What was that? Did you hear that, Yolanda?” asked Molnar with his lips trembling.

“No . . . I didn’t quite catch it . . .” whispered Mrs. Molnar feebly.

The shouts broke out again:

“Down with Julius Molnar! Down with Molnar who wants to sleep! Down with Molnar who wants to sleep! Down with Molnar who wants to sleep!”

The colour of Molnar’s face changed from white to green. His knees were now trembling. He tried to say something but his throat refused to utter any sound. He turned towards Balint and said at last:

“What . . . what . . . what do you think of that, Balint?”

But Balint’s chair was empty. He had taken an imperialist French leave while the eyes of the others were riveted on the radio. Indeed, he was a man of principles and undaunted courage. But this place was too hot for him.

CHAPTER III

THE TRIAL

HALF an hour later the thing they were dreading happened. Molnar's doorbell rang again. He was resigned to his fate by now and opened the door himself. Two uniformed policemen stood in front of him, with bayoneted rifles on their shoulders, tommy-guns in their hands and revolvers in their belts. These were their usual weapons, which they wore when standing at the street corners, directing the traffic. Molnar was relieved to see they were carrying no extra arms. There was no sign of 88 millimetre guns, medium tanks, amphibious vehicles or night fighters. The sight of these practically unarmed men filled him with relief, but his features darkened almost immediately. Was it not too early to rejoice?

The two policemen stepped inside the flat. One handed over an envelope to Molnar.

"Sign here," he said.

Molnar signed on the dotted line.

"What is this?" he asked and waited for the reply with his eyes closed.

"Summons."

"Summons?"

"You heard. To the Torony trial. You'd better hurry up."

"Torony trial?" he asked, astonished and petrified.

"You don't mean Torony, the wrestler?"

"Of course I do. Man, where do you live?"

"And . . . and what am I summonsed as?"

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"As spectator."

"But why . . . what . . . what happened?"

The policeman who talked to him took his pencil out of Molnar's hand and put it back into his pocket.

"Don't ask too many questions. Hurry up. It begins in an hour's time. If you are late there will be trouble."

"It won't be for the first time either, that not the chap in the dock but some of the spectators will be hanged," added the other policeman encouragingly.

Molnar was still incredulous.

"A trial on Sunday?"

"You got anything against that?" asked the first policeman.

Whereupon the two men left abruptly and slammed the door behind them.

There was not much time to lose. The summons stated clearly that Mr. and Mrs. Molnar were to appear as spectators in the People's Circus (Dress Circle, row E, seats 23 and 24) at the trial of John Torony, and his accomplice, accused of nationalistic deviation.

At 5 p.m. the trial opened. These spectacular trials were usually held in the Circus since the ordinary courtroom could not hold a mass audience. There was hardly standing room in the Circus. In the middle of the arena stood the dock—the "prisoners' bench" as it is called in Eastern Europe. On it sat John Torony and another man, obviously the accomplice, handcuffed and guarded by six heavily armed warders. The audience was booing them angrily. Opposite the two prisoners stood the judges' bench, vacant as yet, and behind it were the correspondents from all over the world. There were five microphones, too, all neatly arranged, one for the prisoners, one for the judges, a third one for the prosecutor and the counsel for the defence and two for the

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audience. From the radio engineer's panel were controlled the large placards which lit up with various instructions for the audience's reaction. "LOUDER", "SOFTER", "MORE ANGRILY" and "JUST RIGHT". On Mrs. Molnar's right a uniformed man was sitting—he looked like a customs official—and at the sight of the uniform the Molnars decided to take part in the general booing. Just in front of him Molnar saw a man, wearing horn-rimmed spectacles, who looked fairly middle-class. He had a friendly face and Molnar risked some enquiries.

"What has he done?" he whispered.

"Who?"

"Torony. Did he lose last night?"

"Lose? Man, where do you come from? Of course he didn't lose."

"He didn't?"

"Certainly not. He won. Hundreds of thousands of people were roaring and cheering under his window all night," the man went on whispering. "I was there, too. And there were three ministers, too. The Local Leader went up to his room at 4 a.m. and made him a Distinguished Citizen of the People's Republic. Boo," he suddenly roared.

"Boo-boo!" roared Molnar, too. Then he whispered. "But I can't understand this. I should never have imagined that he even knew what nationalist deviation means."

"No, I don't think he does."

"And who is the other accused?"

The man had no time to reply. At this moment the three judges entered. The President was a professional judge, a former lawyer. He was to give the trial a professional colour. He sat between two lay People's judges

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—a fishmonger and a cowhand—two reliable Party members who were there to supervise the trial and especially the judge. The audience jumped to their feet as these three stormed in looking grim. The judges sat down followed by the audience, and John Torony was ushered before the judges' bench.

The President gave a sign to the Public Prosecutor, who stood up and read out the charges. He read thirty-four pages in forty seconds. Then the hearing of the first accused began.

"Do you plead guilty or not guilty? "

"Guilty, Mr. President, very guilty," replied Torony in a loud voice.

"Did you understand the charges? "

"Yes, I did."

"Liar. Nobody could have possibly understood them read at that speed."

"I am sorry, I did not understand them."

"Don't prevaricate. Give straight answers."

Torony was a little taken aback. So he shouted:

"Down with Capitalism! "

The President reprimanded him.

"It's too late shouting these slogans now. That won't save your neck."

"No, sir," said Torony obediently.

"Don't answer back."

As Torony's examination proceeded, Molnar began to grasp what had happened. Torony had entered the ring the night before and faced the heavy-weight wrestling champion of Faraway Country. When the gong went for the first round, Torony had walked up to Bolubov, danced round him for a while, touching his arms and neck in the usual manner of wrestlers; then, after this short warming up, he had grasped his opponent's neck,

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thrown him over his shoulders and on to the carpet with a resounding crash. Both Bolubov's shoulders had touched the ground and the referee had declared the fight over and Torony the winner. That was Torony's crime. To defeat a wrestler from Faraway Country amounted to nationalist deviation. The whole thing was made much worse by the noisy and enthusiastic celebrations which had followed during the night, attended even by ministers of the People's Government. Faraway City complained about the rough treatment meted out to the distinguished visitor and the Servilian authorities realised that they had to make amends. So the three ministers concerned agreed that the simplest and most convenient way to rectify their ideological mistake would be to have Torony hanged without any delay. To make the whole show more impressive, they indicted the referee, too. He was the second defendant.

"Why did you do it?" said the President to Torony.

"Because I am a reactionary spy and an enemy of the people."

"Was the way you behaved worthy of a Party member and a stakhanovite at that?"

"But I am a spy, you see."

"Did you not know that the wrestler from Faraway City was invincible?"

"Yes."

"Then how did you dare to defeat him in thirty seconds?"

"National . . . what did you call it . . . ?"

"Deviationism," the President helped him out. Then he went on with the examination.

"Did you use brute force?"

"Yes, I did."

"Did you even try reasoning? Socialist arguments?"

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Marxist theory as would have been right facing a Comrade? ”

“No.”

“Brute force only? ”

“Yes.”

“Well, tell the Court how the whole thing happened.”

“The Circus was full,” Torony began, “and the chaps shouted . . .”

“You mean our Comrades? ”

“Yes, all our Comrades shouted : ‘ Go at him, Johnny ! Break his neck, Johnny ! ’ ”

“So you want to put all the responsibility on our Comrades? ”

“No. I think they were enemies. All our Comrades are enemies of the régime.”

“Carry on.”

“So I picked him up, used a Nelson . . .”

“Wait a minute. Nelson was a British admiral, wasn’t he? ”

“Oh, no. A Nelson is something quite different. A Nelson is . . .”

“Don’t argue with me. Nelson was a British admiral. A high-ranking officer of a foreign navy. So you are a traitor, too.”

“Oh, yes, I am a traitor, too,” Torony agreed eagerly.

“So you used a Nelson? ”

“A double Nelson.”

“Then you are a double traitor? ”

“Yes,” nodded Torony. “And a reactionary spy and an imperialist. Will you kindly hang me, *please*? ”

“You must have a little patience. Do you admit that you were also in the pay of the Imperialist Republic? ”

“Well . . .” Torony appeared embarrassed. “Well . . . I don’t quite know.”

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"What do you not know? "

"I don't know what is the practice."

"The practice is for everybody to admit this."

"Then I was."

After the Public Prosecutor's fiery speech the President called on the defence.

"Mr. President, Judges of the People's Court," counsel for the defence began. "I am truly ashamed to stand here representing this criminal wretch, this enemy of our Party, this self-confessed traitor, spy and nationalist deviationist. The Servilian constitution, however, in fairness to all defendants, lays it down that every accused shall have a defence counsel, so here I am, trying to do the best for myself . . . I mean the worst for him . . . I am sorry, I mean, the best for him. But I am not here to stand in the way of punitive justice. It is as clear as daylight that this man has committed the crimes he is accused of; and ugly and repulsive crimes they are. So there is only one thing for me to say. I have to ask the People's Court to take into consideration as an aggravating circumstance the fact that the accused is a highly intelligent and educated man. He attended meetings of the Academy of Science, so he can be described almost as an Academician himself. Yes, he attended lectures of the Academy. But what kind of lectures? I am asking this question, because it is indeed relevant. Lectures on "Thermonuclear Reaction in Deuterism and Stellar Reaction". Yes, Mr. President and Judges of the People's Court, *reaction* and *reaction*, that was the only subject he was interested in, even in his capacity as a man of science. In the interest of justice—real justice, I mean—I must ask the Court to pass a heavy and exemplary sentence on my client."

Counsel sat down among cheers. The referee's lawyer

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made a similar speech, pointing out that in his madness, conceit and wickedness, the referee was more prepared to believe his own eyes than to rely on the teachings of the world-famous Party theoreticians who were all of the unanimous opinion that wrestlers of Faraway Country were invincible. Counsel sat down and then the President turned once again to Torony.

"John Torony, you have the right of last word. Have you got anything to say?"

Torony stood up and in a clear and firm voice shouted:

"Down with Capitalism! Down with traitors! Down with me!"

The referee who had an eye for detail, improved on this:

"Down with traitors! Up with me!"

The judges withdrew to consider their decision. One minute and thirty seconds later they reappeared. Everybody in the Circus jumped up and stood to attention. There was deadly silence. The President waited for his green cue from the radio engineers before he started delivering sentence.

"In the name of the People's Republic . . ."

They were both found guilty and sentenced to death.

All their property was to be confiscated and, in addition, the referee was to be deprived of his political rights for ten years. The Court found it an extenuating circumstance for John Torony that he had been a stakhanovite, so he was to be deprived of his political rights for five years only. An hour later they were both hanged in Leader Square, in the presence of 200,000 enthusiastic spectators. When Torony was marched to the gallows, he looked the hangman bravely in the eye and shouted at the top of his voice: "Down with Capitalism!"

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When the trial was over the Molnars walked home with heavy hearts through the busy and lively streets of Yoketown. They carefully avoided Leader Square. Julius Molnar could not help asking himself: would he, too, one day, stand before the People's Court? The terrifying booing of the audience—his own terrifying booing—re-echoed in his ears. And it seemed to him that he heard again the terrible cry of the demonstrators: "Down with Julius Molnar who wants to sleep! Down with Julius Molnar who wants to sleep! Down with Julius Molnar who wants to sleep!"

CHAPTER IV

A TELEPHONE MESSAGE

AFTER a night of the usual sleeplessness and of unusual nightmares and agony, Molnar was astonished to find himself next day the happiest man on earth. He did not know exactly what had happened, but he felt as if the world belonged to him. He felt like a king who dreamt that he was a beggar, condemned to death for stealing two loaves and woke up to realise that he was still the ruler of a vast country with millions of adoring subjects.

* * *

On the front page of *The Free Gaol* there was a huge headline: "Sleep Campaign". Under it a long leader in praise of sleep. "We, the men and women of the People's Democracies"—the article explained—"are the only people in the world truly, honestly and fervently in favour of sleep. Our main, indeed, almost our only goal is to sleep peacefully. It is only the capitalist wake-mongers who do not want to sleep. Only they are against tranquillity, rest and sleep because idyllic sleep is against their interest. Only these wakemongers have the effrontery to state that we are not ardent supporters of, and faithful believers in, peaceful sleep. . . ." And so on, and so forth, for two full pages. "But it is not enough to sleep," the article concluded, "sleep must be organised."

The streets had completely changed their appearance during the night. All the anti-sleep posters were gone. The walls and trees were full of new posters. "Sleep!—is the slogan of the People's Democracy." "Peaceful

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Sleep for our people!" "Down with the imperialistic wakemongers!" There were many similar slogans and pictures and cartoons, too. One drawing showed a baby—obviously a democratic baby—in sweet slumber; another showed the President of a distant imperialist republic, who was awake. On a third, one could see a huge, comfortable bed, with high pillows and simple, democratic but warm covers, and the caption explained that the Great Leader, the Central Lama of the Party who lived in Faraway City, yes, the Great Leader himself was asleep under the progressive and ideologically correct eiderdown.

Huge posters—red words painted on white linen—were just being stretched up across the streets, between two opposite houses: "Down with the Wakemongers! Long Live Sleep!" and "Ours is the Party of Progressive Sleep" and "It is not enough to sleep—sleep must be organised."

In Leader Square, the bronze statue of the Great Leader had been hastily removed during the night—that statue had shown him awake—and a new, improvised wooden statue replaced it. The new statue showed him lying on a couch with his eyes closed. A huge gramophone and loudspeaker had been placed inside this new statue, and the statue uttered a snoring sound day and night which could be heard within a radius of two miles.

Molnar, going to the factory at 6.30 a.m. looked around hopefully, expecting to descry his own improvised statue as well. After all, he was the true originator of the Sleep Campaign, he thought, a kind of Sleep Stakhanovite who wished to oversleep his norms.

He reached the factory without seeing any reference to himself.

He still did not quite know what had happened. In

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fact, few people knew. The fact was that when word of the former anti-sleep campaign reached Faraway City—as the news from Servilia always did—the Great Leader himself had decided that the anti-sleep campaign was ideologically erroneous and was to be replaced by a vast sleep campaign. So a telephone message to that effect was sent to Yoketown and to all the capitals of the liberated slave-states.

Just before reaching the factory gate, Molnar saw about sixty young men approaching him in military formation, marching in the middle of the road, and singing gaily. They wore brown uniforms, long black boots and carried rifles. At the end of each verse all sixty of them fired their guns in the air. In front marched a young man who was carrying a board bearing the rubric: SLEEP BRIGADE.

And they sang this rousing march:

Sleep! Sleep!
By day and night and dawn!
Sleep! Doze!
Have a nap and yawn!
Sleep! Sleep!
That's the new idea that we sell,
That is what we shout
And shriek and roar and yell.

We order you to sleep, in prose
And oratory verse:
Our Leader is the greatest sleeper
Of the Universe.
Sleep like our heroic comrades,
Popoff, Bledoff, Rokoff:
Sleep, 'cause if you don't
We'll knock your ruddy block off.

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Next they uttered rhythmical snoring sounds and then fired in the air three times.

The brigade stopped right in front of Molnar. Four young men left the formation, marched to the pavement and distributed pamphlets. These consisted of one single sheet of paper; at the top was the portrait of the Great Leader with his eyes closed, underneath a smaller portrait of the smaller Servilian Leader with one eye closed, and at the foot were printed the words of the sleep march. It was headed: "Sleep, Sleep! By Theodore Barna, People's Poet."

Late in the afternoon, Molnar entered the class-room of the little Party Seminary full of expectations and his bosom swelling with pride. For once, he had been anxious to get there as soon as possible. For once he would be praised and held up as an example, he thought. Vlatsek might even apologise to him and congratulate him on having been the first to hit on the right ideological approach to the problem of sleep. But Vlatsek opened the lecture without saying anything about him. He paraphrased the slogans of *The Free Gaol* article, praised the sleeping democrats and bitterly attacked the Capitalist wakemongers. "Now . . . now," said Molnar to himself and sat erect at his place. He threw a loving and caressing glance at Yolanda. After all, without her advice he would never have uttered the complaint which had led to such glorious results. Vlatsek's lecture was interrupted by noises from outside. It was nothing particular, only a sleep march, the new song and much shouting of slogans.

"Long live sleep!" the crowd shouted.

Then: "Down with the wakemongering hyenas!"

And then: "Down with Julius Molnar who cannot sleep!"

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Then they started singing again and marched away.
Vlatsek finished his lecture.

"Any questions?" he asked.

Toch, the Conscientious Intellectual, stood up.

"What is going to happen to the old campaign?" he asked.

"Which old campaign?" asked Vlatsek slightly astonished.

"The anti-sleep campaign," Toch explained.

"What anti-sleep campaign?" asked Vlatsek as he had never heard of it before.

"The anti-sleep campaign, Comrade Vlatsek, we have been conducting up to now."

"I still don't know what you are talking about," declared Vlatsek in a stern voice.

"How are we going to explain this sudden change to the people?"

"Comrade Toch," said Vlatsek curtly, "Faraway City decided that we should organise a sleep campaign, and in accordance with this we are organising a glorious sleep campaign on the grand scale. But it means even more. It also means that there has never been an anti-sleep campaign."

"But Comrade Vlatsek," Toch shouted in great excitement, "up till to-day we led demonstrations and shouted slogans . . . sang songs . . . uttered battle-cries . . . all against sleep. In some streets you can still see a few anti-sleep posters. People must remember. They must remember Comrade Barna's beautiful anti-sleep poem and . . ."

"Liar!" cried out Barna. "That's a lie and slander! I have never written a word against sleep. You'd better take care what you say."

"I don't understand . . . I really don't understand . . ."

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muttered Toch taken aback. "It would only be in the interest of the Party and the cause to explain. Everybody remembers. Everybody must remember."

Vlatsek talked to him now in a paternal, almost loving voice.

"You don't understand, Comrade Toch. But it doesn't matter. You will. There never has been an anti-sleep campaign. Never. You stay here when the others go and Comrade Barna and I shall endeavour to explain to you a shade more clearly. Any other questions, Comrades?"

There were no other questions.

When the others left, Toch stayed behind. For three days he did not turn up in the Seminary. On the fourth day Balint, the former Social Democrat, asked Vlatsek:

"Is Toch ill?"

"Who?" asked Vlatsek, surprised.

"Toch."

"How do you spell the name?" asked Vlatsek again because he had never heard of the man.

"Toch, Comrade Vlatsek, Toch. The Conscientious Intellectual, you know. We all know him. He's been in this class ever since we started coming here."

"I know no man called Toch. Never met him. In fact, a man called Toch never existed."

There was a short pause. Then Vlatsek asked Balint:

"You are sure you are not mistaken?"

"Yes, I am sorry. I made a mistake in the name. I mixed him up with a man called Sonnenschein."

They never saw Toch again. But sometimes they thought of him: "What a nice man he could have been if he had been born at all."

CHAPTER V

SLEEP CAMPAIGN

"It's not enough to sleep—sleep must be organised!"

And sleep *was* organised on a grand scale. Sleep-meetings were organised in dozens and scores in the streets and work-shops, in the towns and in the country, in Servilia and abroad. Sleep-meetings and sleep-demonstrations were held every day or rather every night. As people after having finished their daily work had to attend seminars and were never free before midnight, or a little later, these sleep-demonstrations had to be held between two and four in the morning.

"The reactionary liars and wakemongers have the arrogance to allege that we don't sleep," roared the various Vlatseks on the various street corners, work-shops and halls, "but look at us, even in the small hours in the morning here we are, to express our unshakable faith in peaceful sleep and idyllic tranquillity."

The people replied with tremendous cheers to these utterances and started singing Barna's sleep march. They filed out to the streets and marched homeward in military formations, still roaring and thundering the march under people's windows at four o'clock in the morning. It was amazing to see how one single telephone-message from Faraway City had convinced all the people that the sleep campaign was a good thing. Nobody ever uttered one single word against it; nobody ever offered any criticism; nobody ever asked publicly any questions which reflected a shadow of doubt. At all meetings resolutions were carried and—astonishing as it may sound—always

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unanimously. It happened only twice that slight hitches occurred. At one meeting the Under-Secretary of Finance—who had held his post throughout the previous four years—forgot to mention the Great Leader's name in his otherwise most impressive speech. Next day it was explained in the newspapers that he had been a criminal lunatic since the age of two and had now been taken to an asylum and hanged. Another speaker, a stakhanovite foundry-worker, in the course of his speech used the word "although". Next day *The Free Gaol* told its readers that in fact, he was a kulak, a spy and an enemy agent, but now he had realised his mistake—namely that it *was* a mistake to be a kulak, a spy and an enemy agent—had confessed to all his sins, and he was to be sent to the Land of Eternal White Christmas to be re-educated in one of the government's Montessori camps.

The resolutions, accepted at the end of each meeting, expressed Servilia's determination to work day and night to promote peaceful and democratic sleep. They threatened the imperialist wakemongers in increasingly menacing tones.

The resolutions were also printed and the sleep declarations, so they were called, circulated for signature. On the strict orders of the Party (people were threatened with dismissal from their jobs) millions signed these declarations with spontaneous enthusiasm at least eight times per head. It is to the eternal glory of the organising ability of the Party that 134 per cent of the illiterates, too, signed the sheets at least three times. (Three is certainly less than eight, but one really cannot expect more from illiterates.) As the sleep demonstrations only ended at four a.m., the collection of signatures could not begin before that time, and it went on till six o'clock, when

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people had to leave for the factories and offices. Between four and six in the morning, the signature-collectors explained to the signatories:

"It is only the reactionaries and spies who do not sleep at this hour. We are going to annihilate and liquidate all those who are not asleep at this hour of the night."

The sleep demonstrations became more convincing, more impressive and noisier every night. Large sleep-brigades marched through the streets, singing Barna's beautiful and rousing march. People collecting signatures appeared in the homes every morning between four and six a.m. The members of youth organisations went goose-stepping through the streets of villages and towns, rhythmically shouting: "Sleep! Sleep! Sleep!" Loud-speakers, uttering deafening snoring noises were driven about throughout the twenty-four hours. The blast of fireworks shattered the city every night. Every morning at three the bells were rung to remind people that they had one solemn duty at that hour: to be peacefully asleep. At four-thirty in the morning a salvo of 120 guns was fired in honour of peace and tranquillity.

The democrats even took the fight into the enemy camps. They decided to organise a sleep congress in Steel City, in the land of the wakemongers. The organisers did not want to cause any trouble. Indeed, they decided to bring their own snoring machines and guns. They wanted to import their own fireworks and organise a mighty demonstration from the ranks of their own followers. But the wakemongering authorities refused admission to the organisers at the frontier of the country, using the feeble excuse that the demonstrations were too noisy. Typical wakemongering trickery! Luckily, it was recognised as such. As if all the deafening noise, bursting of eardrums, ruining of nerves had not been

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caused only and exclusively in the interest of sleep and tranquillity.

So the campaign returned and continued with increasing vigour in Servilia and the other liberated slave-states. The number of guns fired nightly was increased from 120 to 360 to the greater glory of harmony and peacefulness.

CHAPTER VI

THE WIDOW OF THE NATION

IT happened in these days that the fate of Julius Molnar was fulfilled. He, the real father of the movement, had been almost forgotten. But he called attention to himself once again. He was ordered to go on circuit and collect signatures for the sleep declaration. He was to go from house to house in Lysenko Street and was to report in the Party Office, under No. 13, at 4 a.m. He did not turn up. So two agents were dispatched from police headquarters, called the "House of Freedom", to see whether anything was wrong with him and whether he needed advice or support.

The agents knocked on Molnar's door with their rifle butts, and as the door was not opened within three seconds, they broke it in. Sleepy and terrified, Mrs. Molnar came out to the little hall to meet them.

"Are you Mrs. Molnar?" one of them, a red-haired youth barked at her.

"Yes, I am," she replied meekly.

"Where is your husband, Julius Molnar?"

"Julius?" repeated Mrs. Molnar. "He's asleep."

"Asleep? Is he?" roared the red-haired agent with ironical fury. "The traitor! The imperialist spy."

"Isn't he ashamed of himself?" bellowed the second agent. "Being asleep at this hour instead of going round to collect signatures for the Sleep Campaign?"

"Where is he sleeping?" roared the red-haired youth again.

"In there." Mrs. Molnar pointed to their bedroom.

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At this moment they heard a sharp noise from the bedroom as of a glass shattering. Mrs. Molnar looked at the two men, then spun round and rushed back into the room. The two agents were close on her heels.

"He's killed himself," shrieked Mrs. Molnar. "He's killed himself. . . ."

"What happened?" asked the red-haired youth stupidly.

"Can't you see. . . ? He's taken an overdose of sleeping tablets. His veronal . . . there's the empty box . . . and the broken glass. But he can be saved, he can be saved, I'm sure. . . ."

"I hope so," said the second agent.

"For God's sake go and get an ambulance . . . hurry . . . hurry up!"

She pushed the second agent out of the flat. He obeyed her with an obvious eagerness to help.

"He can't be dead," said Mrs. Molnar weeping. "He took the veronal a minute ago. When he heard your voices from the hall."

The red-haired youth gave no reply.

"But he can be saved, I'm sure. He can be saved easily. If the ambulance comes in time."

"It will be here in time, don't worry," said the red-haired youth. Mrs. Molnar thought she detected a note of irony in his voice. No, she must be mistaken. "Persecution mania," she thought. "No wonder, though." She looked at the man. "They are brutes but at the sight of the tragedy some humane feelings must have crept back into their hearts. Indeed, they seem to try to be helpful." She felt almost grateful to the red-haired youth. She was not alone at least. She forgot for the moment that if she had been alone no tragedy would have occurred.

THE WIDOW OF THE NATION

The ambulance was there inside five minutes.

"Quick! To the October Hospital!" said the red-haired man to one of the ambulance men. "No time to lose. There'll be hell to pay if this chap dies."

"Thank you. . . . Thank you very much," said Mrs. Molnar in tears. "May I come with you?"

"You may not!" said the red-haired agent sharply.

"I'll ring up in an hour. . . . But you will save him. . . ? You will save him, won't you?"

"We'll save him all right, don't worry." He was outside the door now. He turned back and added: "He won't get away with it quite as easily as that."

And he slammed the door in Mrs. Molnar's face.

* * *

In the hospital Dr. König and Dr. Moha—the two doctors on night duty—rubbed their eyes angrily when they were wakened by Maria, the nurse.

Molnar was lying now on a couch, in a small room. Maria would not open the operation theatre before instructed by the doctors that it was necessary.

"We can do it here all right," said Dr. König, the elder of the two. "Veronal. It's not very serious. We shall pump out his stomach and he'll soon wake up."

"I don't know," said Dr. Moha in a meditative voice.

"What don't you know?" asked Dr. König. "Give me the sound, Maria, and come nearer with that bowl. By the way, you may go back to sleep, Moha, I'll do it myself if you like."

"When did you say he took the tablets?" He turned to the two agents.

"About half an hour ago," replied the red-haired youth.

THE WIDOW OF THE NATION

"That's all right. We'll soon wake him up. Come on, Maria. We talk too much and do too little."

"Wait a minute," Moha interrupted him again. "I think we are about to do the wrong thing."

"The wrong thing?" the other asked icily. "You do not wish to teach me how to use a stomach pump?"

"Oh, no," replied Dr. Moha placidly. "But to do a stomach lavage would be the wrong thing."

Dr. König grew impatient.

"Well, what would *you* do? Extract his wisdom tooth?"

"You want to do the right thing medically, König," said Dr. Moha, "but the wrong thing ideologically."

"Ideologically?" König repeated with astonishment. "Did you say ideologically?"

"I did say ideologically," repeated Moha coolly. "I am not quite sure myself, mind you. But we must think twice before doing anything. This man wanted to sleep. Would it not be a bad ideological mistake to wake him up?"

Dr. König lowered the sound he was about to push down through Molnar's nose.

"Well, I must say you've got something here. On the other hand we are doctors and not ideologists."

The red-haired youth coughed.

"I mean . . ." added Dr. König, "we are doctors and ideologists, that is to say, ideologists first and doctors afterwards."

"That's what I meant, too," agreed Moha. "But it is too difficult to see what is the right step to take."

"Save him," put in the red-haired youth. "He mustn't get away with it."

"Yes, you see," said Dr. König, "that is an important point. A doctor's duty is to save a patient's life."

THE WIDOW OF THE NATION

Moha kept silent for a few seconds.

"There is something in all these arguments. On the other hand this idea about doctors' duties and saving patients' lives is the old-fashioned teaching of the former Capitalist universities."

"I agree," said König, realizing that he had made another mistake and remembering that Moha was after his job. "The man is asleep at the height of the Sleep Campaign. So far so good. On the other hand the Party, to make the Sleep Campaign really effective and a glorious success, does not need people who are asleep. It needs sleep-fighters, who collect signatures, take part in demonstrations and work for sleep. If this patient is given up to eternal sleep, we don't gain a man, we lose one."

"Yes, that may be a point of approach, I admit," replied Moha thoughtfully, "and that's why I am saying that we must think twice before deciding to act in one way or another. The Great Dead Leader said in his work 'Dialectical Productivity in the Highest Stage of Capitalism' that the revolutionary aim of the proletariat must always be to achieve the *immediate* tasks."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute, my dear man," König retorted triumphantly. "He certainly said that, I admit. But in his later work, 'Dialectical Distribution of Consumer Goods and the Inverse Ratio of the Revolution', in the third chapter—or was it the fourth—he expressed the view . . ."

* * *

Molnar's funeral was quite an affair. A huge crowd gathered in the cemetery, with the usual spontaneousness of Servilian crowds, two members of the government were

THE WIDOW OF THE NATION

present and twenty-seven wreaths were placed on the bier, all sent by various Party organizations. After the Torony affair the Party felt that they needed a new popular hero; preferably a dead one this time, to be on the safe side. There he lay now, the new hero, in his uncovered coffin. Vlatsek bade a last farewell to him, in the name of his closest and most intimate friends and comrades.

"Julius Molnar," he said and his voice was full of emotion he could not quite control, "Julius Molnar, you, in your modest way, inspired our Great Leader to initiate the great Sleep Campaign. And our Great Leader saw the potentialities hidden in your modest suggestion and interpreted it in his own wonderful and inspired way. You knew, Julius Molnar, better than anyone else, that our Great Leader is the blessing of humanity and the blessing of Servilia. It was our Great Leader who liberated our country; it was our Great Leader who gave us the Party! it was our Great Leader who guided us in the right direction, towards ever nobler and higher goals; he is our Father and Brother and Grandfather and Grandmother; he is our Uncle, too; it was our Great Leader who gave us the glorious Sleep Campaign and it was our Great Leader . . ."

At this point Molnar sat up in his coffin and asked in his mild and modest way:

"Excuse me, Comrade Vlatsek, but who is being buried here, I or our Great Leader. . . ?"

"Shut up! How dare you interfere!" shouted Vlatsek, a little taken aback by this interruption. He made urgent signs and the lid of the coffin was hastily shut. Now that the deceased was safely out of the way, Vlatsek continued his peroration:

"He—I mean you, Julius Molnar—you were a devoted

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and noble servant of our cause. 'Sleep' was the slogan of the day and you wanted to sleep. You were determined to oversleep your norms. You had one single purpose in your mind—to serve the common ideal and set a glorious example. No further reward can be given to you," he continued with a trembling voice. Then he pulled himself together and added: "But I am glad to tell you, as we bid you farewell, that your worthy spouse, Mrs. Yolanda Molnar has been awarded a state pension as well as the title of 'The Widow of the People's Republic'."

Molnar was lowered into his grave among enthusiastic cheers.

* * *

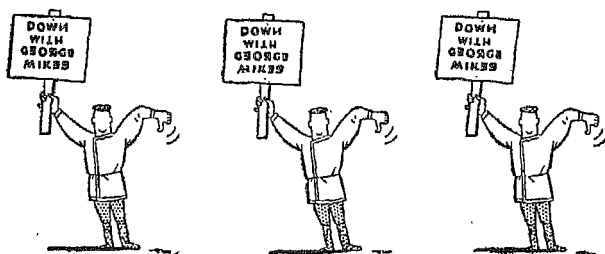
Weeks and months passed. Mrs. Molnar became a well-known and honoured member of the new society. She was often invited to mass meetings where workers were asked to work more, where signatures were collected in support of one great cause or another, and she naturally became a leading figure of the Sleep Campaign. With the passing of time, Julius Molnar grew in stature in her memory. She was inclined to forget small and unimportant details of the past. Julius was a hero and a martyr. Sometimes, thinking of Julius, she pictured him on horseback, although she knew that Julius had never seen a horse at close quarters. Thanks to Julius, she had become a national figure. When it turned out that her state pension was quite a decent little annuity, Comrade Vlatsek—the great Comrade Vlatsek himself—proposed to her. She declined the offer with thanks. She decided to stick to the name of "Molnar"—she owed that to Julius, the hero and martyr, whose great example was not to be followed by anyone. Besides, she liked her

THE WIDOW OF THE NATION

title, "Widow of the People's Republic". It sounded as though the People's Republic were dead.

* * *

And the Sleep Campaign, the great campaign in the interest of peaceful sleep and idyllic tranquillity is still going on, gathering momentum and becoming more energetic, wilder and more terrifying every day. And woe to him who dares to sleep. Luckily, no one can sleep even if he tries to. The roar and thunder of demonstrations, fireworks, snoring-machines and guns is so shattering and deafening that—as a direct result of this glorious campaign—general world-sleeplessness may break out at any moment.



PART TWO

Mostly on Politics

A SHORTAGE OF DRAGONS

I LOVE Franco. I mean General Franco of Spain. He may not be very likeable; indeed, he is not entirely my cup of tea; but he is necessary.

"Necessary," in fact, is an understatement. For the left-wing intellectuals of Europe he is a blessing. We have lost all our beliefs and we are in the wilderness. We feel that we have betrayed, or at best, have been compelled to betray, many of our ideals, and we have a guilty conscience. Then dear Franco's name crops up in the news, we draw our swords, we thunder threats, spit fire and are satisfied that if we can be so uncompromising against what remains of the old, as well as the possible seeds of new Fascism, then we must indeed be good and true left-wingers. We pat ourselves on the shoulder and our bosoms swell.

Where are the good old pre-war days when we could thrive on our idealism? When we could fight against appeasement and against rearmament at the same time? Yes, I know that even to-day the staunchest left-wingers among us fight for and against rearmament in the same breath; but the new campaign somehow lacks the punch and enthusiasm of the old.

Where are the old days of 1943 when we (Mr. Winston Churchill and the American Republicans among us) were championing the cause of the Soviet Union? We (and this time I must exclude Mr. Churchill) did our very best to remain blind and deaf, but in the end we were compelled to take notice of certain phenomena and our unbounded admiration for the Soviet Union began to cool off. Now we feel robbed of our dreams. We loved—we

A SHORTAGE OF DRAGONS

thought—a virgin, but a pile of birth-certificates has convinced us that she has seven illegitimate children and lives on the wages of sin. A few of us maintain that the birth-certificates are forgeries; and the wages of sin are really the wages of dialectical virtues; but the rest of us cast our eyes down and do not utter the name of our former beloved.

What is left to us? There is this Third Way business. You cannot get enthusiastic about it because it is an essentially negative conception. It means: neither Soviet Russia nor capitalist America. The remaining seventy-eight other possibilities are lumped together and called the Third Way. Still worse, in practice the whole theory boils down to this: "We fight communist Soviet Russia; but we fight capitalist America, too. Ours is the Third Way. Consequently we march with America." In W. S. Gilbert's phrase: "You cannot call it very good, however great your charity."

Of course, there are some minor foes to be slain. We can still make a row and declare that putting charges on Health Service spectacles and dentures was plain Fascism. But there is the answer that wigs are still free—so we are still a socialist country. Indeed, in many ways our Socialism is purer than Soviet Socialism, because the unfortunate Soviet citizens have to pay for their wigs.

Our real trouble in a world of general shortages is a shortage of dragons. Here we stand, modern St. Georges, in full panoply, armed to the teeth and ready—and there are no dragons to slay. I often want to put one of the usual small ads in a popular evening paper: "REWARD! Stolen all left-wing ideals. A reward will be paid to the first person giving such information as will lead to the recovery of the stolen property intact or *pro rata*."



G.M. loves F.F.

A SHORTAGE OF DRAGONS

And then I remember dear Franco. My heart warms and overflows with gratitude. We must fight him—I decide once again. This we can truly state, we are compelled to fight Communism, too, but—look at us!—we are fighting Fascism with equal zeal and determination. It is true that Franco represents no international danger; it is also true that he is a toothless lion. So let us send our ambassadors back to him, let us embrace him and go on fighting him to the bitter end. Whether Franco means international danger or not—we declare with firm conviction—we cannot give up the Spanish people to Fascist rule. Then a Central or East European refugee timidly points out that we have given up a number of nations to Communism. We shout him down, because such thoughts are plainly embarrassing. We turn back to Franco with flashing eye and glittering spear. Dear, dear Franco—what would become of us without you? We do love you with almost the only true love which exists in human hearts: the love of St. George for the dragon.

HOW TO BE A FLOATING VOTER

As a neo-Britisher I exercised my right to vote for the first time on February 23, 1950. Knowing that there were many thousands of persons in the same position, I ventured to submit the following guidance and advice to them.

IF you insist on being taken seriously you must become a floating voter. Staunch and steadfast adherents of the various parties hardly count: an enthusiastic member of, say, the Labour party will vote Labour in any case, and that's that. In this country it is the floating voters who decide the election.

It is quite easy to be a floating voter. A really good floating voter needs temperament rather than brain. If you think that Mr. Menzies of Australia must be a great statesman because he is going to abolish petrol rationing: vote Conservative; if you do not like paying, even indirectly, for other people's petrol, vote Labour or Liberal; if Mr. Cube's aphorisms on the sugar-boxes irritate you, vote against the Conservatives; if, on the other hand, you think that it is decent of the Socialist Ministry of Food officially to distribute the anti-Socialist propaganda on the sugar-boxes, vote Labour. If you think that Mr. Churchill's chapter on the "Wizard War" in his memoirs is brilliant, vote for him; if you disapprove of Lord Beaverbrook for permitting David Low to leave the *Evening Standard*, vote against him.

A really excellent floating voter who is prepared to float properly—indeed, for whom floating is more important than voting—will take into consideration before

HOW TO BE A FLOATING VOTER

deciding the fate of the country such factors as the price of herrings, the quality of margarine, Mr. Morrison's accent, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe's performance during a recent murder trial, Lord Samuel's literary lectures, Mr. Bevan's attitude to the rules of etiquette, and the voter's own digestion. (Indeed, the floating voter's digestion may have decisive influence on the election results. Many people in good health used to resent the National Health Scheme, but if their digestion has suffered in the meantime, leading them to take advantage of the scheme, they have probably changed their political outlook.)

Your second patriotic duty—you are told—is not to waste your vote. One ingenious person has declared that to vote Liberal means wasting your vote. Thousands of people, including Mr. Churchill, seem to have accepted this idea. In countries which vote on the system of Proportional Representation only a fraction of the votes is wasted, as it is decided, let us say, that every 100,000 votes elect one M.P. In Britain, however, many millions of votes are wasted at every election. So apparently it is our patriotic duty to vote for the majority.

But it is not even as simple as that. Consider—to take only one instance out of many—the 1945 results in Worcester. The Conservative candidate received 13,523 votes, the Labour candidate four votes less—that is, 13,519—while the Liberal received 4,459 votes. In this way a minority of 13,523 elected a Conservative M.P., while the majority of 17,978 wasted their votes. On the British system it is theoretically possible for the majority of the electorate to waste their votes altogether and for the minority to win all 625 seats in the House of Commons.



Keep floating!

HOW TO BE A FLOATING VOTER

If it is really your patriotic duty not to waste your vote, then it is your patriotic duty to vote not with the majority but for the successful candidate. But you cannot possibly know in advance who the successful candidate will be. The only way out is to vote only when all results are known. A variant of this system has been successfully introduced behind the Iron Curtain. There, in fact, the result of the election is decided first and people vote subsequently. Hardly any votes are wasted. I am sure this system has no attraction for the advocates of "don't waste votes": in effect, however, they are advocating it. As a naïve neo-Britisher I would advise you to risk wasting your vote. Indeed, I still think that wasting a few million votes is what the whole election is about.

There is some talk about the possibility of an offer from certain sides to form a Coalition Government after the elections. People debate this suggestion as if it were possible to form any other Government in Britain. The British are very proud of their two-party system. The gist of the British two-party system is that they have ninety-eight parties. They all take part in the election: the Ulster Unionist, National Liberal, Communist, Scottish Nationalist, Welsh Nationalist, Irish Nationalist, Labour Independent, Independent Labour, National, Christian Action, Independent Progressive parties, and the Socialist party of Great Britain—that makes twelve; the remaining eighty-six are made up by the three main parties. To unite—as happened after 1945—Messrs. Ivor Thomas, Morrison, and Zilliacus in the same organization and call it one party reminds us—us neo-Britishers at least—of the English habit of uniting mock-turtle soup, boiled cabbage, boiled potatoes, shepherd's pie, jelly, and what is believed to be coffee in one meal, which

HOW TO BE A FLOATING VOTER

is called lunch. You may vote for the coalition called Labour party (41 parties), or the coalition called Conservative party (37 parties), or the coalition called Liberals (8 parties): but if you really want to vote for one single party vote Welsh National.

The British, knowing that this time they will have a great number of naturalised voters, have introduced some complicated little novelties with the sole purpose of puzzling us. First of all certain parties call themselves Liberals who are not Liberals at all. The National Liberals used to call themselves Liberal Nationals, but they have turned the name round, to muddle me personally. If you do the same thing with the Labour Independents and call them Independent Labour the result is not a new name but a totally different party. As well as these there are Conservatives who stand with Liberal support, and there are Liberals, Conservatives, Socialists, and, above all, Communists who stand with very little support.

If you are a logical person you will ask yourself many more questions. How is it possible that with such a voting system Britain belongs to the very few democracies in the whole world which are able to elect stable Governments? Why do the British say of all their political institutions that if they were good enough under Ethelred the Unready they must be good enough to-day? Why do they not say that if they were good under Ethelred the Unready they cannot possibly be good enough to-day? If you are a logical person you will ask yourself why, if the British can make bad institutions work in an excellent way, they always want to improve their good selves and stick to the bad institutions instead of sticking to themselves as they are and improving their institutions.

HOW TO BE A FLOATING VOTER

But if you were a logical person you would never have come to England; and had you come you would not have stayed; and if you had stayed they would never have deemed you worthy of being naturalised. So do not lose your courage, and keep floating.

DOWN WITH CHILDREN

I MUST say a few words against children and against the dangerous doctrine that we should live for them. This high-sounding and seemingly unselfish theory is worse than nonsense; it is self-deception and cowardice.

Humanity—with the possible exception of the Romans—has always been afraid of its present. It has always tried to escape either into the future or into the past. During the Middle Ages, religious faith served as the rope of sand by means of which people hoped to climb up to Heaven. By the eighteenth century Western humanity made a full turn and people, instead of looking forward to a celestial future, tried to bathe themselves in the glories of the national past. Modern nationalism is an attempt to see ourselves without the warts; and many historians, writers and poets are the masseurs and cosmeticians of the national beauty parlours, trying to dye our greying hair golden-blond and trying to lift our faces. When the wrinkles are nicely hidden behind our ears we can call ourselves ravishingly beautiful. In some countries merely to notice a wrinkle is called treason, but, generally speaking, we are all inclined to believe that we are growing younger and younger every day.

In the last few decades, however, we have been turning back to the future once again. Not to the celestial future this time; nor to the near future, which would involve looking our present hardships in the eye. We are turning towards the future of our children and—to be on the safe side—to the future of unknown and faraway generations. We regard ourselves as brave, unselfish and noble because we are facing great difficulties for the sake of

DOWN WITH CHILDREN

our great-great-great-grandchildren. People all over the world are exhorted to believe that governments which are unable to give them enough bread and leisure to-day can efficiently cater for the needs of the seventh generation hence. People are inclined not to regard themselves as slaves or fools, but as noble-hearted great-great-granddads, labouring for the welfare of their descendants, who are to have a jolly good time in A.D. 2250.

A hundred years ago children—if we are to believe Dickens and a number of other English and continental writers—were expected to be grateful to their progenitors for having been born. Parents, particularly fathers, were tyrants, and for his amusement the child had to wait until the merciful lapse of time turned him into a tyrant. Now our ideas have changed, and we think that everything should be done for the future generations. This is a cowardly way of explaining away our own failures. It would need some courage to live our own lives; it is so much simpler to build the future by begetting children and feeding them on national dried milk.

I love my two children as much as any other devoted father; but I did not die on the day when the first was born. That would have made the birth of the second rather difficult. I am very much alive and intend to remain alive, partly for their sake, but partly for my own. I do not wish them to accept the idea that I live only for their sake (which is a meaningless phrase in any case). I do not wish to make it easier for them to accept their possible future failure. At the age of twenty-five they, too, may have children, and it would be too easy for them to “live for their children”. The best way of helping one’s children is to make a success of one’s own life, whether one is a cobbler, a colonel, a chartered accountant or a carpenter.



Claim our rights . . .

DOWN WITH CHILDREN

Let us have the courage to be a little more selfish. We shall not find it so difficult as we seem to believe. Not so terribly long ago I was a baby myself. I was, and you were, the child for whose sake everything was supposed to be done; I was, and you were, the baby around whom the earth rotated. Very well, here we are, Babies, all of us, to claim our rights.

CRYING DOLLS

TO-DAY I read this advertisement in the newspapers:

LIFE SIZE DOLLS, BEAUTIFULLY DRESSED UP.
THEY SUCK A BOTTLE, WET THEIR NAPPIES
(WHICH CAN BE CHANGED) AND SHOUT: "WALK-
WALK"—AND "MILK-MILK". 63/- NET.

I find this alarming. This new gadget or invention certainly indicates a sharp decline in the intelligence of dolls. My little daughter, Judy, is just two years old, but her simple little dolls, made of plastic and dressed in rags (price: 5/6 net), can do and say much more than that. She has long and animated conversations with her dolls, and the dolls seem to give intelligent—or at least satisfactory—answers to all her questions and detailed explanations to all her queries. I, personally, do not hear these answers, but she does. And she would regard her dolls very dumb creatures indeed, if they kept repeating: "Walk-walk" and "Milk-milk".

While Judy's dolls can of course drink milk and wet their nappies, they can do much more than that. They also go on errands for her; deliver messages to her Mummy; go shopping; drive my car; they can cook and dust; they can sit on the swing and help her in her varied activities; they can sing and are always ready for a lively chat. Sometimes they are naughty. They answer her back a shade too arrogantly, but I am glad to say they usually apologize afterwards.

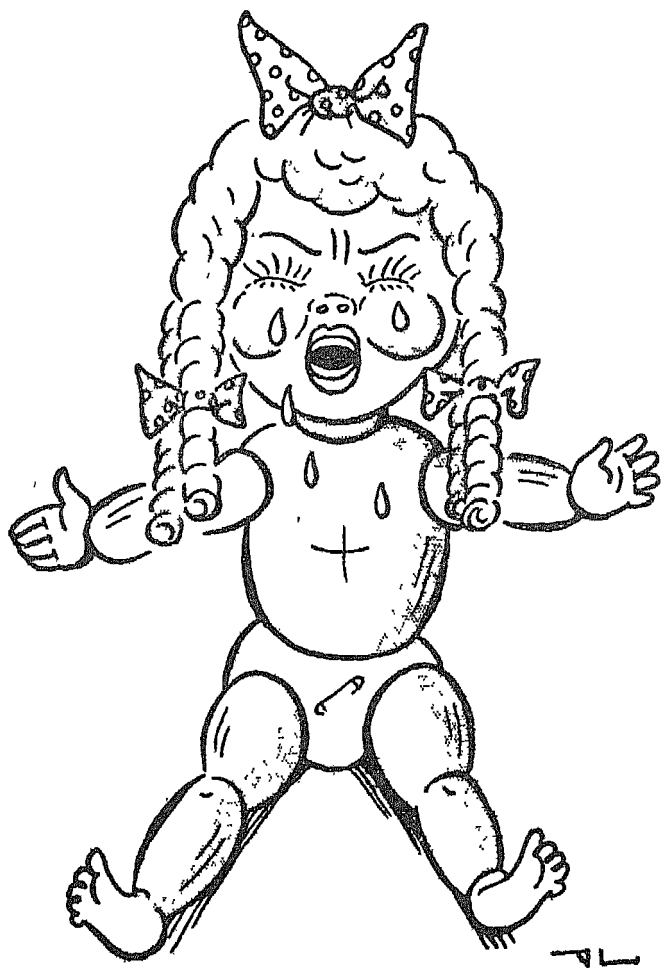
Dolls—and many other toys—are supposed to appeal to the imagination. They are supposed to do all the things Judy's little plastic dolls do. And much more.

CRYING DOLLS

When they actually wet their nappies, cry and say "Walk-walk" and "Milk-milk"—they become idiots. The new wonder-dolls may be able to cry, but they cannot laugh, smile, nag and sing, like their simpler colleagues. They may be able to suck milk, but they cannot eat vegetables, cook their own food and help with the drying up. And what a miserable vocabulary which consists only of two words. Judy's dolls know at least a thousand words and their vocabulary is getting richer every day. They even know a few words of Hungarian. The wonder-dolls are unable to learn and improve themselves. On the day when the mechanism goes wrong, they will not become like the more knowledgeable other dolls. They will become still duller little creatures, unable to utter even their two set phrases.

In our age, books have been more or less replaced by films. When you are reading a book you have to *do* something yourself. You have to conjure up all the rich details, personalities and settings, which in the films are ready-made, leaving nothing to the imagination. The same process has now reached the world of dolls. The next step is to invent tennis balls which do not need to be hit: they will bounce hither and thither on their own. And to make chess-boards on which you need not play; you just push a button and the figures will move about, replaying the games of renowned masters. And why not perfect tailors' dummies, dressed in tails, which would be able to dance with young ladies with ease and mechanical perfection? At the end of the dance the young ladies could push a second button to make the dummies shrink, put them in their hand-bags and take them home.

No doubt this is the direction in which we are moving. The true horror of the future is not the hydrogen bomb,



“Walk-walk”

CRYING DOLLS

which indeed may solve all the problems of the future in a summary way. For me, the real horror of the future is a new generation—young ladies dancing with automatic dummies and repeating three phrases: “Walk-walk”, “Milk-milk” and “Jewels-jewels”.

PART THREE

Travel and People

DOWN WITH HOLIDAYS

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT ought to have included a fifth freedom in his famous list of four: the freedom from summer holidays. A summer holiday is one of the annually recurring tiresome duties—they belong to the same category as Christmas festivities, birthdays of aunts and visiting the British Industries Fair.

What do I have against summer holidays? I shall give you a few reasons out of a list of 112.

Naturally enough, you want to find a place which (*a*) is in the mountains, (*b*) by the sea, (*c*) by a lake and (*d*) in a beautiful valley; you want a place which is (*e*) very exclusive and (*f*) ridiculously cheap; where there are (*g*) no foreigners and (*h*) no English people; which is (*i*) in the centre of a Metropolis and (*k*) distant from all civilisation; where (*l*) you can dance and drink every night and (*m*) where there is not even a dance band within ten miles radius because your aim is, after all, to have a good rest and be in bed every day at 6 p.m.; where you (*n*) can do a lot of lovely shopping and (*o*) there are no shops to tempt you to spend your money; where you can (*p*) swim in the hills, (*r*) ski in the lake and (*s*) just sit quietly on the sea; you want a place where the food is (*t*) French—but no salads please; (*v*) Swiss—but not fattening please, (*w*) Italian, but no oil please, (*x*) Hungarian, but no paprika please, (*y*) English, but still (*z*) edible. (You probably will give up the last two conditions as you realise that they are a bit difficult to comply with.)

When you think that you have hit on the place of your dreams, fulfilling all your requirements, then your wife

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will tell you that if you wanted something high, she wants something low, but if you wanted something low, she absolutely insists on the heights; that the climate should be hot, moderate, cool and subtropical and she wants a Casino in the neighbourhood where she cannot lose money.

If these conditions raise some unexpected difficulties, your doctor will help you out, instructing you that you need cool mountain air because of your lungs, but you must avoid coolness and mountains because of your heart; that you should swim two hours per day because of your liver and must not go near the water because of your kidney; that you badly need dry air because of your gout and weak bladder, and need moist air because of your abnormally stony gall and diaphragm.

I dare say you can find a suitable place after a little thinking, but I find this choice—perhaps I am too moody and would need a dry sea and very flat mountains for my moodiness—well, I find this choice a shade too tiresome.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer lets you have foreign money in various amounts. I understand you may have as many roubles, Bulgarian leva, Roumanian lei, Japanese yen and Eskimo krönen as you wish; you may have a moderate amount of various West European currencies and even Swiss francs are easily obtainable for all those who are prepared to spend a few moonlit summer nights queueing in Regent Street. You can now get dollars, too, and it goes without saying that your wife may accompany you as your secretary, your son of four as your under-secretary and your daughter of one as your assistant stenographer. There is only one currency which is absolutely unobtainable: pound sterling. But as you do not need pound sterling on your journey—indeed, it



Pants aren't sacred

DOWN WITH HOLIDAYS

is an offence to take it abroad—this is only a minor difficulty; still it is a difficulty.

In this modern age of technical wonders you could travel very fast and very comfortably if you could travel at all. In the last century you could reach Moscow in eight days: since the invention of jet-propulsion you cannot reach it at all; in the times of Queen Victoria it took one four days to get to Karlsbad; soon we shall have planes driven by atomic energy and Karlsbad will be about as far away as Tasmania used to be in the times of Queen Elizabeth. Some countries you cannot enter; from some countries you cannot get out; even in England though distinguished visitors are welcome, wretched foreigners are not wanted. I have given a lot of thought to this problem in the last twelve years. But I am sorry to confess that I have come to the conclusion that “distinguished visitor” and “wretched foreigner” is a distinction without a difference.

I do not allege that customs is not a necessary evil; I cannot offer anything better in its place. Still, as I was brought up by respectable and old-fashioned parents, I still do not like the idea that my own wife's most intimate pieces of linen underwear should be examined by a conscientious but somewhat dreary bureaucrat. I have no secrets; I am prepared, indeed I itch, to disclose my innermost thoughts to the world at large; but I grew up in the firm belief that my socks are sacred and my pants are exclusively my own concern.

I think it is mediæval and humiliating to stand opposite a man and watch him digging into my dirty linen. I hold, however, that the “law is the true embodiment of everything that's excellent”—so whenever I buy a few things abroad, I hand over a list of my newly acquired goods to the customs official. As so much honesty—naturally

DOWN WITH HOLIDAYS

enough, I admit—is much too suspicious, I usually end up by unpacking my whole suitcase and the customs official waving my pants in front of a happy and cheering crowd and cross-examining me with great skill and thoroughness, as to why I wear zips on my trousers instead of the more customary buttons. I never smuggled out of or into any country as much as a needle or a pillow-case, but my twelve-years-old ruin of a typewriter caused more suspicious frowns on the faces of the customs officials of many nations than the lady who smuggled all her extremely valuable jewellery by the simple device of having all her stones fitted in a brooch of cheap and often-seen design and wearing them quite openly on the jacket of her costume.

Well, well, well, you may say, but one cannot deny the fact that travelling abroad on your summer holiday (1) broadens one's mind, (2) fosters international understanding and (3) gives one a rest.

Well, well, well—I most solemnly deny all these facts.

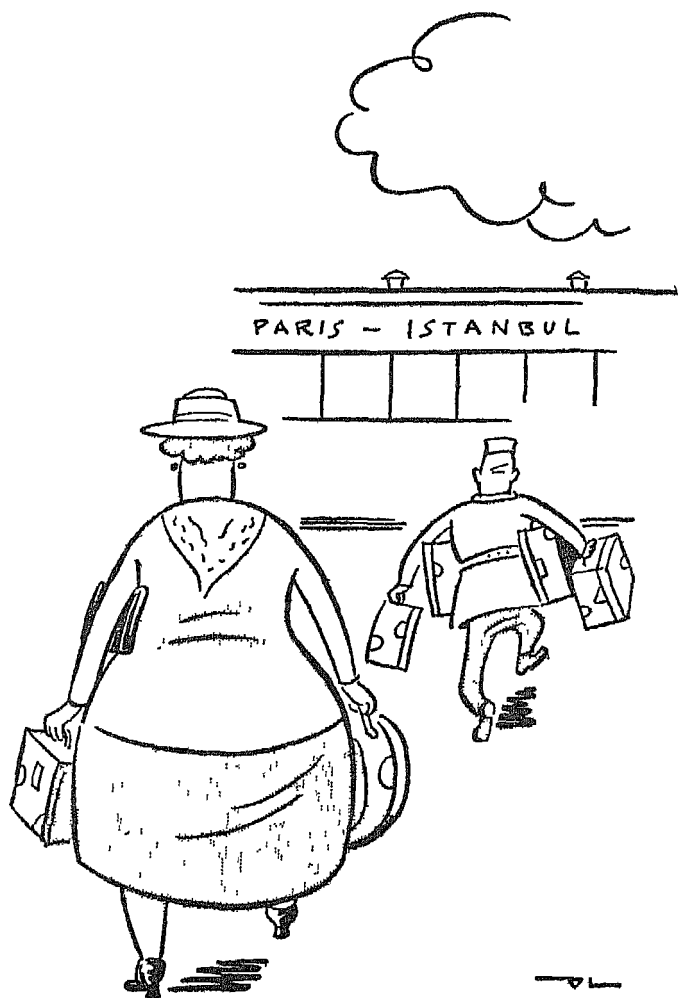
My mind, I noticed, had but moderately broadened by the fact that the porter at Dover remarked: "Lovely day isn't it"; that the porter at Dunquerque informed me—in fluent French—that there were no seats available and I would have to stand on somebody's else's shoulders till we reached Paris; that the Swiss hotel-keeper explained to me that I should have to pay 2.50 francs for a bath; that an Italian car park attendant offered me twenty Chesterfield cigarettes at the price of a 1937 Austin Seven. My mind was not sufficiently broadened when I rushed across the Louvre and the Uffizi establishing a new world record; when I checked up on the Baedeker in many a town in Europe and found that all the statues and pictures were really there and that all famous men had been, in fact, born somewhere; when I discussed the

DOWN WITH HOLIDAYS

weather and the fishing possibilities with the English visitors who were staying in the same hotel; and when I learnt that *zmrzlina* meant ice-cream in Czech and *n'est-ce pas* was the French for "isn't it", but not quite.

International understanding was not fostered in my bosom when I decided to strangle the secretary of a Dutch hotelier, when I beat up a simple, charming and clean-minded Austrian shepherd for yodelling and—I am sorry to say—when I stabbed an Italian cicerone in the back for trying to tell me the thrilling history of the 237th piece of stone, starting with Hadrian and finishing with a little dog who had passed there two minutes before.

Rest? Apart from the troubles already listed, I hate packing. I love to go on a journey with two shirts and a tooth-brush, but if I can persuade my wife to leave the refrigerator and the piano behind, I consider myself lucky and sigh with relief. It tires me to death to negotiate with travel agents who, instead of a flying ticket to Stockholm, which I ordered, invariably try to supply me with a third class railway ticket from Athens to Salonika with the excuse that everything is "heavily booked" and I should be happy to have that, at least (I love their "at least", I must say). When I arrive somewhere it exhausts me to climb on top of every hill, admire every hut where a village celebrity was born, see every field where a historical battle was lost, see the tree under which a great politician uttered a terribly witty remark and rush to a picturesque inn to drink the famous local drink which tastes like a mixture of water, boot-polish, pepper and iodine, and makes my stomach ache, though not too badly. Under the blue Italian sky I wish to sit and read *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; on the shores of the grim North Sea I desire to sit and read *Gide's*



Broadens the mind . . .

DOWN WITH HOLIDAYS

Journals; on the top of a green and rocky Swiss mountain I want to read the learned and slightly boring *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*; on the sunny banks of the Rhine I feel inclined just to sit and scratch. But so many poets were born, so many politicians uttered terribly witty remarks, so many villages concocted their own local drinks and so many battles were lost throughout the centuries, that no rest is given to me. Still, I have the comforting thought that during the eleven months of hard work which is before me I may—I repeat: I may—get over the exertion of my holidays.

A MISUNDERSTOOD NATION

Do not try to understand the French. They are much too logical to be understood by the English and much too complicated and European for the Americans. Historical patterns always give a clue to the character of a nation, but a clue is not enough. The French have always been clear in their minds as to what they want, and they have hardly ever got what they wanted. A century and a half ago they wanted a Jacobine revolution and they got a national Empire; the English wanted to avoid revolution at all costs and they went about it so carefully that they achieved almost all the results of a revolution without actually having it; the Americans, in turn and at the same time, put their faith in a written constitution, and they have been busy ever since finding out what it really means. Or take the *Entente Cordiale* of 1904 for example. The French were clear in their minds that at the price of important colonial concessions they should side with Great Britain and buy security *vis-à-vis* Germany. They knew what they were doing, but they did not get their security. The English, on the other hand, believed that at last they had solved certain troublesome colonial problems and—as so often during their history—they happened to line up for the defence of democracy, right and justice, for selfish reasons. The Americans had their minds made up about one thing: they had nothing to do with the petty quarrels of Europe. So in World War I (just as in World War II) they came in and finished the job. A. J. P. Taylor once wrote something like this: The French see the problems but find no solutions; the English are stumbling towards solutions

A MISUNDERSTOOD NATION

without seeing the problems. We may add: the Americans take the bull by the horns and stupefy the analytical minds of Europeans by proving that problems and solutions are just as simple as that.

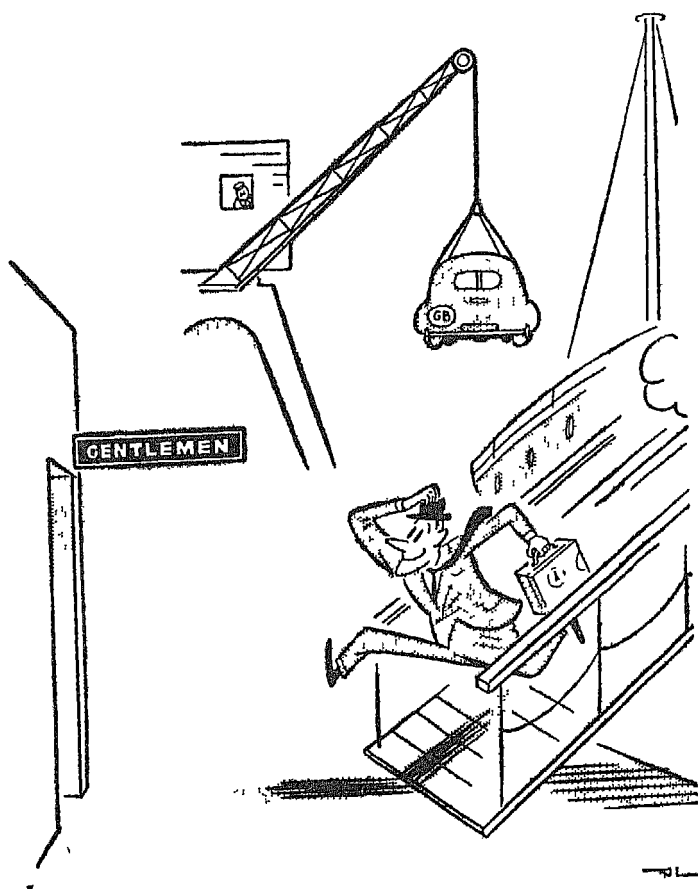
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The French are the most misunderstood people in the world. They are misunderstood as a nation and misunderstood as individuals.

The British and the Americans look at France with their own eyes. This is the basic trouble in all the world's problems, but it is one that cannot be helped. There is after all no other way of looking at things. It is natural, but it sometimes leads to tragic mistakes. The Anglo-Saxons know French history, but the French have the moral of their past in their blood. They crave for security and yet find themselves pushed more and more into peril; they are slightly bored by the process of being liberated at short intervals. They prefer the heroic and romantic "resistance" to seemingly useless wars where—they feel—mighty allies leave the heaviest burdens on the weakest shoulders. The French are even misunderstood geographically. The British and Americans seem never to have looked at the map and do not seem to realise that while it keeps changing—France is always left just on the western edge of whatever danger threatens.

* * *

The French are misunderstood as individuals, too. People say, for instance, that the French are sometimes polite in a formal way but rude on all other occasions. This notion is spread, I believe, by people who base their judgment on bad novels written about the ambassadors of Louis XIV. The French are truly polite. If you ask



Eat in France

A MISUNDERSTOOD NATION

an Englishman where X street is, he will say: "First on the left, second on the right," smile kindly and disappear before you have had time to thank him. Ask an American—he will ask you, in turn, why you want to go there, what your profession is, how many children you have and whether you are faithful to your wife. Then he may accompany you to the place and settle your business into the bargain. If you stand still anywhere in France and look lost, someone will walk up to you, ask you what the trouble is, answer your questions in a brief and concise manner, wait for your thanks, say that it was a pleasure for him to help you, raise his hat and leave you.

Then they say the French are dirty. Some English people have discovered primitive and indeed dirty lavatories in some French villages, hence this belief. The French spend a greater part of their income on food than the English. Taste English food and you will wonder why the English spend any money on food at all. French hotels of some standard are as clean as they should be; it is true, on the other hand, that English lavatories are spotlessly clean even in the smallest village. The right solution is, I suppose, to eat in France and use lavatories in England.

* * *

Do not be ashamed to enjoy food and wine in France. The English have the worst food; the Americans the most beautiful food; but the French have the best. If it is worth while spending two or three hours a day on eating, then it is worth while eating well. Besides, a satisfied man who can enjoy and keeps on enjoying good food is a more understanding, balanced and human person than an ascetic—let alone a necessity-made ascetic. A person

A MISUNDERSTOOD NATION

who enjoys boiled cabbage and beans on toast with fizzy lemonade is worse than an ascetic. (The British succeeded in remaining human *in spite* of their puritan and ascetic nature, but not because of it; the Americans with their beautiful food are on the right path, but as far away from the French as a man who lies under an ultra-violet lamp and looks at beautiful photographs of landscapes from the French Riviera.)

* * *

People talk a lot about the English being reserved. It is nonsense. The English are open, friendly, and hospitable. They do not ask awkward questions of awkward people, and that often makes their small talk dull—because it is always the awkward questions which make conversation lively and exciting. The French, however, are more reserved than the English. I have heard it said that it is easier to enter a French woman's bedroom than her dining-room. This is basically true, in the sense that it is almost impossible for a foreigner to enter French family life.

* * *

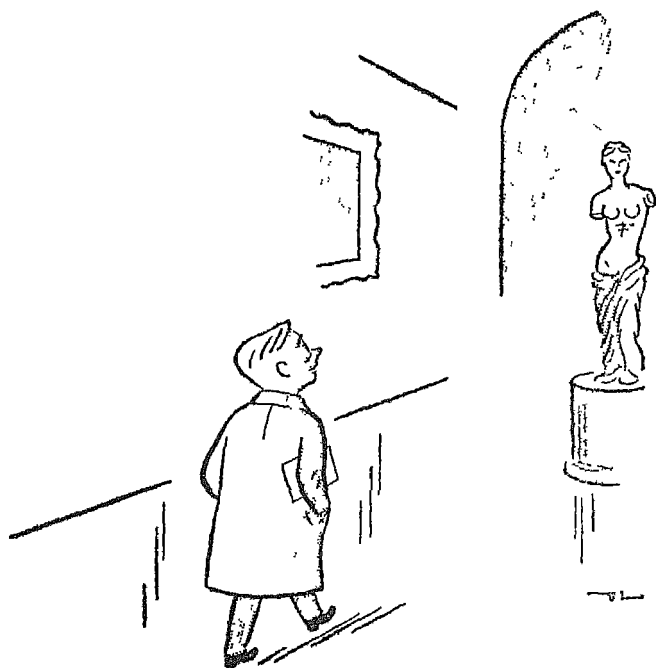
Apart from this the above statement is a slur on French women. And this leads me to another point of misunderstanding. I have heard (I cannot say whether it is true or not) that not even all English and American girls are innocent. Accepting, however, the most old-fashioned moral standards, French girls are probably no better and certainly not worse than the English or American. They only have a different attitude towards love. In England love is primarily companionship; in the United States it means "having a good time". If an English girl gives herself to someone, she gives herself because she is play-

A MISUNDERSTOOD NATION

ing the game and she accepts the fact that the sexual relationship is a part of full companionship. Unmarried American girls are regarded as "good time girls" (not necessarily in the nasty sense of the word), and as soon as they get married they are put on a pedestal, which collapses under them three times a week, but thanks to the wonders of American industry, can be mended in no time. For a French girl love is something beautiful and immensely important. An English girl may give herself to a slightly embarrassed companion who takes her in a perfunctory manner, because they both know it is part of the contract; the Americans may spare some time for love between cocktails and nightcaps twice a week. But the French girls, if in love, are in love with all the warmth of their hearts and all the time. They are certainly more jealous and possessive than the English and more devoted than the Americans. They do not love because they would be lonely by themselves; they do not love because they want to get married; they do not even love for love's sake. They do love because they have warm hearts and red blood in their veins. They do love because they cannot help it. And—God!—how they do love! (Or so I am told.)

In Paris, an English friend of mine told me a long story about a couple who had fallen in love, defied the girl's parents, eloped, and fought the police who were after them, whereupon the boy was locked up for a week; they got married, lived in misery, and when better days came at last—two years after their wedding—they parted and were divorced. My English friend, finishing the story, asked me ironically: "Was it worth while, I ask you?" Of course it *was* worth while. When a boy of twenty meets a girl of eighteen, they fall in love at first sight, get married and live happily ever after and die at

A MISUNDERSTOOD NATION



Don't miss the Louvre!

the age of eighty-seven and eighty-five respectively, it may be decent and more respectable, but—Heavens!—it must be dull.

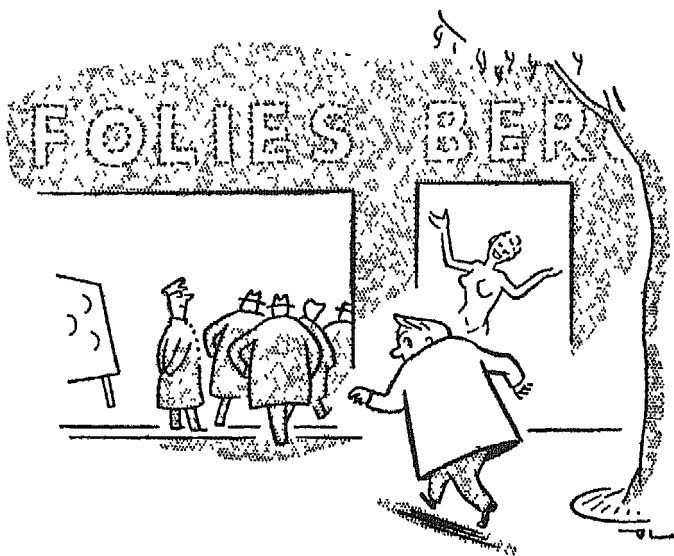
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If you are a tourist in France do remain one. It is a country where it is worth while remaining a tourist—and you cannot help it, in any case. Paris is the most beautiful city in the world and as logical and systematic as French

A MISUNDERSTOOD NATION

brains. London is chaos incorporated; New York, with its innumerable parallel streets and avenues is systematic—as systematic as the corridors of a neatly built, modern prison. But Paris is a poem. Look at the grand squares from which wonderful avenues radiate into all directions. Observe their sense of proportion in presenting the beauties of their magnificent city. It is not ostentatious, not showing off, but it is as impressive as the *Venus de Milo* standing gracious and superb at the end of that long corridor of statues in the Louvre.

Do not miss the hackneyed sights. Go up the Eiffel Tower, bow before the Tomb of the Emperor, visit the *Musée Rodin* and Versailles and Fontainebleau. If you breathe the air of restlessness and if you happen to tread



I always do

A MISUNDERSTOOD NATION

on some problem of French life, do not try to solve them between a visit to the windows of the *Boulevard des Italiens* and *Montmartre*. Look the problems in the face and remember that France is Europe with its glory and its tragedies. Remember that Europe must be saved; and that if either Russia or the United States succeeds in saving it—it will never be the same again. Remember that the French are giants among the nations, that without them neither English liberalism nor the American constitution would exist to-day. Remember all this and then proceed to the *Folies Bergère*. I always do.

HATE THY NEIGHBOUR

A PERIOD PIECE FROM THE EARLY FIFTIES

SWITZERLAND is the world's Garden of Eden. The United States is a good runner-up, but I must give the title to Switzerland. First, Switzerland has no juke-boxes. Second, nobody knows who her President is. And, third, it was the German language which the Swiss pilloried, hanged, drew and quartered, and not the English.

I have revisited Switzerland several times recently, and have found that this ancient, essentially middle-class and petit-bourgeois country has turned revolutionary—at least in the eyes of the visitors from England. I observed—just to mention a few examples—that cheese in Switzerland is manufactured of milk and not of leather, that work is not conceived as a peculiar pastime between cups of tea, and that waiters, though strict and just, do not exact servility from customers.

The bloodless and penniless English invasion of Switzerland started in 1946, and has been on the increase ever since. The Swiss subconsciously resent this invasion and resist it with their greatest weapon: food. Many English visitors fall for the trick. They are interested in food; they fall in love with food; they eat, for instance, schueblig for supper. A schueblig is a colossus of a sausage; what Shakespeare's greatness is in the world of drama, such is the greatness of the schueblig in the world of sausages. The Swiss themselves consider a schueblig a kind of light refreshment between two meals; but it is a sheer menace to the English visitor, who upsets his stomach with it on the first day, does not recover for three weeks, but who years later tells his friends with a



Gentlemen—the King!

HATE THY NEIGHBOUR

sigh: "Oh, food in Switzerland is too marvellous for words. . . ." A piece of apple-tart in Switzerland is as big as a whole ordinary British apple-tart cut in two, and Swiss butter—this has been proved by chemical analysis—contains a great percentage of butter.

As far as the quality of the food is concerned, the Swiss love to pour a little cognac or kirsch into everything, be it sweet, sauce or soup. At a dinner I attended in Lausanne an Englishman tasted so much brandy in the soup that he lifted his plate of consommé and declared solemnly: "Ladies and gentlemen—the King! "

You will find the most surprising means of communication in Switzerland. We made an excursion near Schwyz and travelled from mountain peak to mountain peak by various means. We reached the first peak by bus (2 francs) the second by funiculaire (3 francs), the third by a cog-wheeled railway (4 francs), the fourth by a Sessellift—a single chair moving along a suspended wire (5 francs); we got to the fifth on a Draht-bahn—a small carriage moving on a suspended wire (6 francs). There was a sixth peak, too, and we were offered to be shot out at it by a cannon at the modest price of 7 francs. A notice informed us that should a passenger not arrive in one piece he gets a refund of 3½ francs.

The Swiss managed to build a lovely country around their hotels. Look, for example, at Castagnola, near Lugano. In any other country the place would be an impressive and famous rock, like the white cliffs of Dover; in Switzerland they built a thriving village on the rock, swarming with English visitors who go up the Mountain Bré by funicular railways (7 francs) and breathe the lovely, fresh Swiss air (50 centimes per lungful).

A word about the Swiss language. The Swiss, apart



Watch their language

HATE THY NEIGHBOUR

from about a million of their French and Italian speaking population, write in German; but for ordinary use they have a secret language of their own, called *Schwitzerdeutsch*, or Swiss German. It is a spoken language only, it has no orthography and, if written, it has to be spelt like *Hochdeutsch*, i.e. the King's German. Having no strict grammatical rules either, this *Schwitzerdeutsch* varies a great deal as spoken in the neighbouring villages. However much one may like the Swiss, love and charity cannot go so far as to persuade one that their language is melodious and soothing to the ear. Its many guttural noises remind you of Dutch; its distorted German sound remind you of Yiddish; and the general effect reminds you of gargling in the case of a bad attack of tonsillitis.

The Swiss—there is no getting away from it—are outrageous people, and the rest of humanity feel deep resentment towards them. They were not involved in wars for over a century; they have no outlet to the sea, founded no empires, yet still they are thriving and prosperous; the Swiss franc has the arrogance to be a much better currency than the pound sterling; then, to add insult to injury, the Swiss have helped their neighbours and the rest of humanity in all possible ways—Red Cross, refugees, etc. That is why they are called dull, unintelligent, uninteresting, a nation of waiters, etc. The truth is that they have behaved like civilised people in a lunatic world—and that cannot be easily forgiven.

The real Swiss puzzle, however, is the fact that Switzerland cannot boast of unity of race and language, and yet the Swiss still manage to get along much better with each other than any other people in the world. The explanation of this is that they have the courage to dislike, and even to detest, each other. The Swiss Germans consider their French-speaking compatriots rather bigoted and

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narrow-minded; the Swiss French are alarmed by the "invasion" of Swiss Germans into their country, and if a waitress in Lausanne betrays a slight trace of German accent, people, when she is gone, will turn to each other and remark with a sigh: "Isn't it terrible?" They all know the meaning of this rhetorical question.

Both French and German Swiss feel contempt for their Italian compatriots, and the Italians in their turn prefer to look south instead of north. But aversion goes much further than that. Even in the French part of Switzerland there is great rivalry between the various cities. Neuchâtel just doesn't count, Lausanne considers Geneva too cosmopolitan, a provincial suburb of France; Geneva, on the other hand, says that the people of Lausanne are smug, conceited, provincial in their outlook, and believe that the world revolves round them. The list can be continued almost endlessly, but I will mention only one last example, the traditional enmity between Zurich and Berne.

I believe that this healthy mutual antipathy between the people of Switzerland, her nationalities, provinces, cantons, cities, villages and families is the real basis of Swiss unity. The "Love your neighbour" principle, uplifting as it is, just does not work. In most cases you cannot love your neighbour. You feel a deep sense of guilt for your failure and formulate all sorts of silly, self-justifying and self-righteous theories for your own wholesome and natural dislike of him. You, a noble and Christian soul, must have some excellent and convincing reasons for disliking your neighbour as though the simple fact that he is your neighbour were not enough. The Swiss know better than that. They dislike each other in the interest of general peace; they talk ill of one another because they are determined to preserve their national unity. They

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consider it their inalienable right to detest their neighbours; and they consider it their public duty to give him a fair deal.

ON PSYCHO-ANALYSING NATIONS

I THINK I may claim without undue modesty that I have invented a new science: how to psycho-analyse nations. Unfortunately, I have no time to develop this new science fully, so I shall content myself with jotting down a few basic ideas, leaving it to the scientific world at large to expand them. This new science may change the whole outlook of humanity in time. Or again it may not. My only request to my would-be disciples is, never again to mention my name in connection with the affair.

How should one psycho-analyse a nation? I think nothing is more characteristic of an individual than the way in which he spends his free time and chooses his hobbies. Give two little boys sixpence each and watch how they spend money. The first may buy a cheap wild western thriller and the second a lollipop. You may safely draw the conclusion that the one who bought the lollipop will develop a strong interest in literature. The first is, of course, lost.

Now let us take a step farther. How shall we analyse a certain group? People love drawing up statistics about people's income. This is wrong, or at least irrelevant. The real difference between the working classes and the majority of the middle class is not the fact that the workers make more money. The decisive difference is in their ways of spending it. We must use the method in dealing with nations: watch their leisure.

All nations love sports. That is, all grown-ups love to

ON PSYCHO-ANALYSING NATIONS

sit about and watch others rush around kicking, throwing and hitting balls, while their children sit at home studying history and trigonometry.

Football is the most popular of modern sports. Football is divided into two large classes: professional and amateur. In England (and a few other countries) football is professional; in the rest of the world amateurism still prevails. The difference between the two systems is that professional football-players get salaries and admit it; amateur football-players get salaries and deny it. Amateurism is much nobler and more useful—especially for income-tax purposes. The amateur nations call the English hypocrites.

Certain nations show outstanding skill in some sports and consider these more important than others. In my native Hungary, water-polo used to be considered one of *the most important sports because for a long time the Hungarians were able to give lessons in it to any other nation*. Fencing is also extremely popular—but sabre-fencing only. Foil and épée are considered rather childish and silly. The Italians like all three kinds, but the French, who excel in two kinds only, have a high opinion of foil and épée but regard sabre-fencing as foolish and ridiculous.

The Finns believe in running—but only in long-distance running; the American negroes maintain that no intelligent and dignified person runs more than 200 metres. The Norwegians and Swedes love ski-ing because they are so good at it. (Further research may discover additional reasons as to why ski-ing is more popular in Norway than in French Equatorial Africa.)

The Russians say that manly qualities are displayed in weight-lifting only, and the Turks say the same thing about wrestling because they are so good at it. The

ON PSYCHO-ANALYSING NATIONS

English are deeply interested in tennis, because the Americans play it so well.

The inherently isolationist spirit of the English is also shown by their interest in truly isolationist games such as cricket. The English gave cricket to the world, but the world would have none of it. Even their neighbours, the French, who swallowed rugger, would not play cricket. At a football match twenty-two people rush around and 50,000 spectators watch them. Cricket is the only game where the major part of the team, too, can just idle around, and watch a few of their number do the work. Only a nation with a great colonial empire could invent and appreciate cricket, or vice versa: only a cricket-playing nation could found a really great colonial empire.

American baseball is cricket played with a strong American accent; and American football is as far removed from our soccer as heavyweight boxing is from lyric poetry.

In France and in a number of Central European countries love is a major pastime. Not making love, mind you, but talking about it. When a lady enters a café or a restaurant she is discussed freely: first as a whole, then her face, legs, waist and other details, her dress and finally her past and future. In the street people turn to stare after any woman who is a shade more beautiful than a female Beelzebub. Any withering English or Scandinavian maiden may regain her shaken self-confidence in the streets of Vienna or Athens.

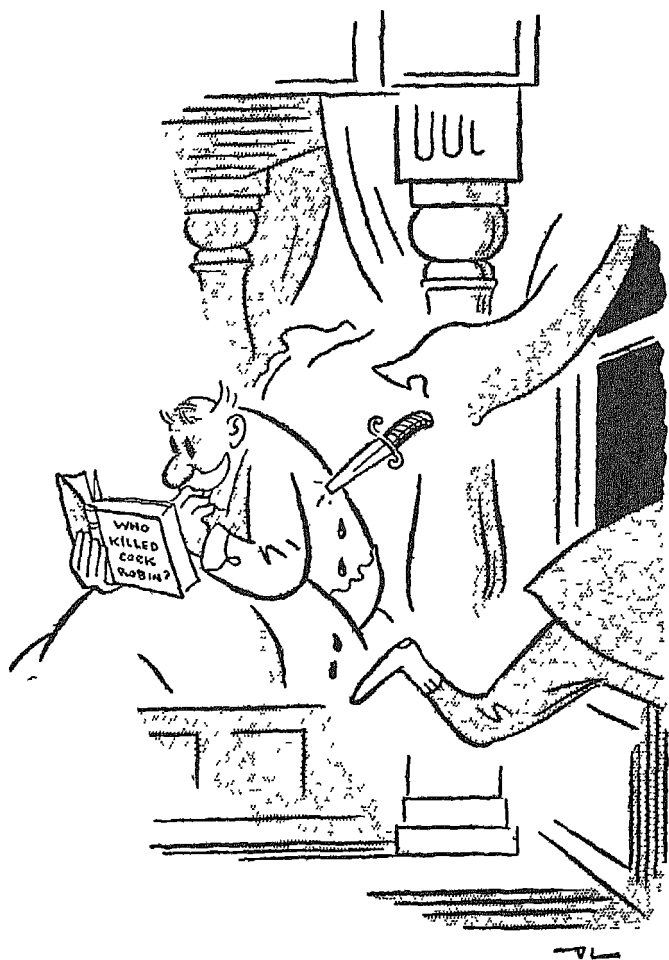
People love dancing, too. In other countries people dance a lot because they enjoy holding each other tight and feeling close to each other. In England people dance a lot because if you dance you can spend an agreeable evening without talking more than ten words.

ON PSYCHO-ANALYSING NATIONS

In America, too, love takes up a lot of people's free time. One of the most popular American entertainments is kissing. Young men and young girls pull up on the highways and kiss each other between 6.30 and 10.30 p.m. This kind of amusement is considered perfectly decent, probably because it keeps you from going to a cinema. Nobody sees any harm in it, and in Boston—the most strictly puritanical of all American cities—you can see people kissing in their cars in the main thoroughfares even at noon.

As far as eating is concerned, of course, one would be able to say a great deal about the habits and cuisine of various nations. But there is only one nation, I believe, which eats as a pastime: the Swiss. I have known people there who consumed two hard-boiled eggs, large slices of ham, a tremendous piece of apple-tart and two glasses of milk between their afternoon coffee and dinner—just as anyone else would smoke a cigarette. Or ladies walk into a confiserie after supper, eat three or four ice-creams, two or three pieces of cake full of chocolate, fruit and cream, and chatter about the miraculous fact that Englishwomen, generally speaking, are somewhat slimmer than they.

Then there is the pleasure of talking. On the Continent politics is the general subject of conversation. The French have heated arguments about politics, and an average Frenchman has more sense of politics than an average British Cabinet Minister. Central Europeans tell good jokes against everybody in public life, and many a good government has come to an untimely end in various Central European countries because of a few deadly jokes. The secret police and the military can stop armed revolts in many countries; but jokes have replaced the free press in some places and inherited its full power. In



Week-end violence

ON PSYCHO-ANALYSING NATIONS

France people argue; in Central Europe they tell stories; in Germany they speak about their souls.

The English are no talkers. They are not more interested in love than is absolutely necessary, they do not discuss politics as a rule, and have no idea how to cook or how to eat. They drink their innumerable cups of tea and frequent the various lending libraries. They do not read; but they consume an amazing amount of printed matter. They like the "how I did it" type of book: autobiographies of politicians and boxers, criminals and film-stars. And the English, the most self-disciplined, peaceful and civilised of all modern nations, never tire of reading stories of violence and murder. I do not mean the detective stories and thrillers only; an average English novel must contain at least one murder. An outsider, judging the English by the majority of modern English novels, would believe that an average English gentleman commits at least one murder every week-end.

What really matters is this: what is the national passion of certain peoples? What do they like best?

The Central Europeans love talking. Their national pastime is to sit about in cafés, read the newspapers, discuss all the women who come in, talk shop and politics and ask questions about the domestic arrangements, income, sex-life and business affairs of acquaintances of ten minutes' standing.

In Sweden there is a fascinating mania of *orientierung*. You run about in the woods with a map and a compass in your hand for hours on end. Please do not ask me what pleasure one gets out of this. I have never tried, nor shall I if I can help it. But this is the greatest mass movement in Sweden. Very probably its the eternal nature-lover's revolt against the town, where he is forced



"La queue c'est moi . . ."

ON PSYCHO-ANALYSING NATIONS

to dwell. It is a harmless passion and much cheaper than roulette.

The Americans love to play with their gadgets. Pushing buttons is the greatest American passion, and perhaps it shows the direction in which we are all travelling. You push a button in the lift, you push buttons or turn handles for cigarettes, chewing-gum, stamps and even for a life insurance. You push a button and get married and another button and get divorced. Juke boxes roar in all restaurants, and about fifty million radio sets are switched on from New York to San Francisco and from the Canadian border (and beyond it, for that matter) down to New Mexico, all day long. I read about a meek little gentleman who shot a sailor in a restaurant because he had started playing "Open the door, Richard," for the thirty-ninth time running on the juke box. He pleaded self-defence, and the jury acquitted him.

In England, queueing is the national passion. People try to explain it away, saying it was a war-time necessity. This is untrue. It is a pleasure discovered through the necessities of the war. It is the expression of the Englishman's self-discipline and the same time, recognition of his individual rights. "I have to wait; but my turn will come and then none, millionaires or ministers, small men or great, can be served before me." They form a queue at the slightest provocation, just for the fun of it. I have seen long queues at stations when the train was practically empty and everybody could have walked in and taken a seat. Once I went to buy a theatre ticket. A gentleman was just being attended to, and I stood next to him. He turned towards me and declared with some hauteur: "There is a queue here, sir." "Where?" I asked with surprise. "I am the queue," he replied with dignity.

SHORT LESSON FOR TRAVELLERS

ON the shores of the sunny Mediterranean I had a thrilling and unique travelling experience. I should hate to sound boastful, but I firmly believe that my experience is unrivalled in the annals of globe-trotting. It may sound incredible, but I have been in Rome and did not see St. Peters, and I have been in Athens and did not see the Acropolis.

* * *

In Rome we landed at 5 p.m., and as we had to interrupt our journey because of bad weather, we were put up for the night by the air company. Among my fellow travellers there was a talkative American and a silent French priest with a little boy. At Rome airport the American, who was in uniform (gold and green tie with silver animals painted on it, long cigar and broad-brimmed, high hat), accosted me with the following laconic and manly statement:

“I speak Italian.”

“Oh . . .” I replied, because I found it a very appropriate answer.

He became bellicose.

“But I speak Italian well.”

“Congratulations,” said I, trying to move nearer to the silent priest and the boy.

“I served in Italy during the war. Landed at Salerno. Stayed in Rome for two years. That’s how I picked up my Italian.”

“I see,” I replied, and even now, six weeks later, I should be at a loss to find a better answer.

SHORT LESSON FOR TRAVELLERS

He gave me a few more details from his biography, his early youth in Wisconsin, his subsequent success as a salesman in New York, and told me all about his mother who, I gathered, was a simple woman with a heart of gold. He caught sight of a porter and asked him in fluent Italian where the gentlemen's cloakroom was. The porter, in still more fluent Italian, gave him the required information. When later we passed the establishment, I reminded him of his intention, but he told me that he was not really interested, he only wanted to show me how fluent his Italian was.

In the hotel he informed the receptionist that he and I wanted to share a room. It was news to me, but as my Italian is not half as fluent as his, I could not protest in time to avert the impending disaster. Having washed our hands, he invited me to go out with him in the evening. He had plenty of friends in Rome, he said, charming boys and girls, all nice folks like he and I, and we would have a grand time. I politely declined. I told him that I was going to hire a horse-drawn cab and see the sights of the city, first St. Peter's and the Vatican—as I had not been in Rome for over ten years. I would have dinner in town and go to bed early. And as we were to get up at 4 a.m. next day, I added, rather pointedly, that I wanted to sleep.

Having listened to another dose of his war experiences (which seem to have consisted mostly of rollicking parties with nice guys and dames, just like he and I) and a few more touching details about his mother (that simple woman with the heart of gold), I hoped to set out on my little excursion.

In the hall I was stopped by the Catholic priest. He was a round-faced and red-cheeked man of forty-five,

SHORT LESSON FOR TRAVELLERS

rather solemn and shy. The little boy in a red shirt was sitting behind him in an arm-chair.

"*Excusez moi, Monsieur,*" he said, "but as you seem to be the only person who is not going out to-night, I should like to ask you a favour."

"Well . . . you see . . . as a matter of fact . . ."

"I have something very important to do. It is vital to me. Spiritual matter of the utmost significance. I must leave. But I cannot leave Gustave alone. Would you take care of him?"

I hesitated.

"It is almost a matter of life and death. It is certainly a matter of spiritual life and death."

I had dinner with Gustave. I asked him whether he was French, he said: "*Oui, Monsieur.*" I asked him how old he was, he said: "Seven, Monsieur." I asked him where he lived, he said: "In Boutigny-le-Rebours, Monsieur." I asked him whether he went to school, he said: "*Oui, Monsieur.*" I asked him whether he liked to go to school, he said: "*Non, Monsieur.*" I racked my brain, but as no further questions occurred to me, we sat in silence there for three hours. At the end of every hour I asked him whether he wanted to go to bed now, and he said: "*Non, Monsieur.*" I took him for a walk and asked him whether he wanted an ice-cream. He said: "*Oui, Monsieur,*" and had three ices. He said: "*Oui, Monsieur,*" to my questions whether he wanted some chocolate, fruit and raisins. At half-past twelve I told him that he had to go to bed and he replied: "*Oui, Monsieur.*" I found the priest snoring when I took Gustave to their room, and my American friend was also in a deep, drunken sleep when I reached our room.

Next morning at 4.30 the priest walked up to me in the hall.

SHORT LESSON FOR TRAVELLERS

"Many thanks, Monsieur," he shouted. "I am sure you found little Gustave a bright boy and a cheerful companion."

"*Oui, Monsieur,*" I replied.

"I am very grateful to you," he continued, "you did me a very good turn."

I wanted to say that nothing gave me greater pleasure than to look after bright little boys to oblige priests of any religion or denomination. But I was too sleepy, so I only smiled vaguely.

A moment's silence followed. Then he spoke shyly again:

"Now I might as well tell you what I was doing last night. You see, I am a priest, and Rome means the world to me. I took a cab and just drove about. I went to St. Peter's and the Vatican. It was a wonderful experience. I hope you two also had a pleasant evening."

Gustave replied for me.

"*Oui, Monsieur,*" he said.

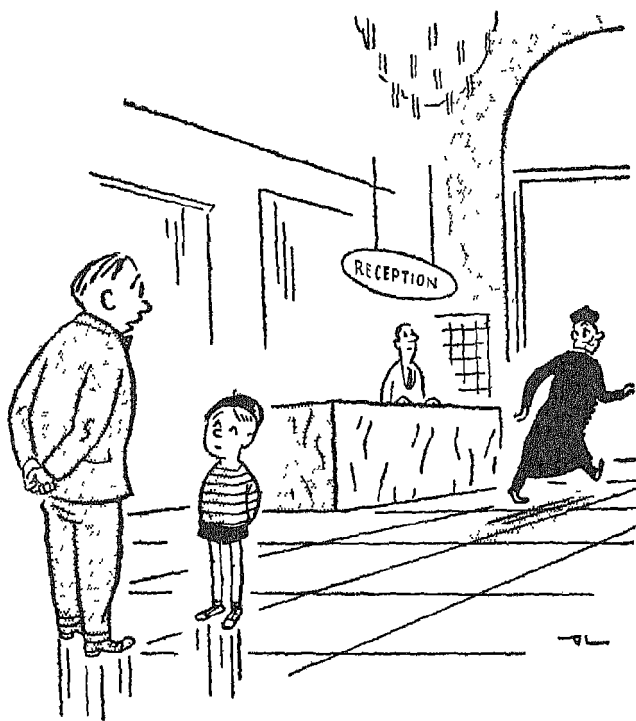
* * *

In Athens I had a much easier job avoiding the Acropolis. I only had two days to spend there, and the first was taken up by the interesting and amusing pastime of trying to find a room in an hotel. Next morning I asked the hotel porter whether there were buses running to the Acropolis or had one to take a taxi.

A short gentleman with a freckled face and a red moustache butted in.

"I want to see the place, too," he said. "I've heard about it. My name is Richards."

We had a few words on our plans and decided to have an early lunch and set out in a taxi at 1.30. We sat down



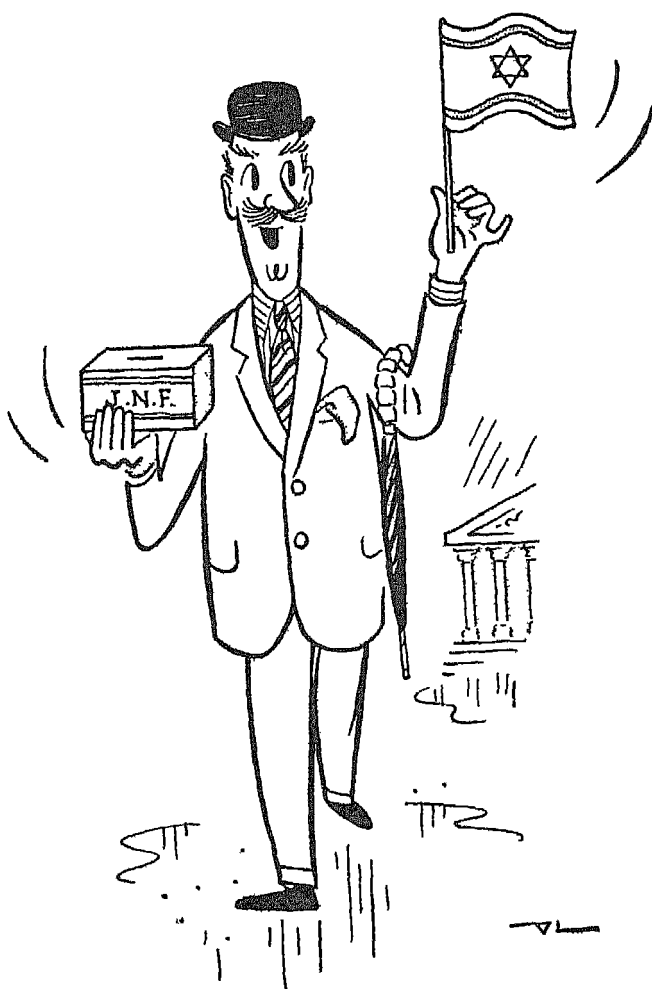
Matter of life and death

SHORT LESSON FOR TRAVELLERS

in the hall and later the porter waved me to his desk. (Greek hotel porters, as a rule, just wave you with a majestic gesture, and hotel waiters ring a bell for you if they have some order to give you.) A tall, slim, long-faced, middle-aged gentleman stood next to him, and the porter informed me that as he, too, wanted to go up and see the Acropolis, we were to take him along and that was that.

After lunch it started raining. The word "rain" certainly gives no impression to the reader of that drenching cloud-burst, of that torrential downpour we witnessed. People fled like mad; the streets were flooded in no time and raging rivers were bursting along the roadways; cars were half submerged and black death descended on the usually cheerful, colourful, noisy Constitution Square. There, on the shores of the sunny Mediterranean, I thought dolefully of the lovely London weather I had left behind and even the friendly, dull and drizzling London rain.

No more ill-assorted party ever sat in a café in Athens. Richards had come from Greenock, Scotland; he was a Jew and a Zionist, a carpenter by trade. He had sold his house in Greenock, packed up and was on his way to Tel-Aviv, to settle there. Everything was to be pleasant, beautiful and dreamlike in the Promised Land. It was just a country where all Jews loved each other and it was, he thought, everybody's greatest concern to help Mr. Richards from Greenock on his way. He knew little of politics and did not care much. Major Sim was an ex-officer who had settled in Cairo and had been in business for the last twenty-three years. He was violently pro-Arab, anti-Zionist and anti-Jew. Richards made enthusiastic remarks on Jewish successes in Israel; Major Sim did not reply. Two minutes later he turned to me



Converted to Zionism

SHORT LESSON FOR TRAVELLERS

—these two hardly spoke directly to each other at all—and, not replying to him, of course, just to start a general conversation, contradicted him. His statements were always full of veiled insults against (a) the Jews in general, (b) immigrants from England and (c) Richards in particular. Luckily Richards noticed nothing. After two hours I grew desperate and turned the conversation to Britain. They violently disagreed again, uttering one sentence in five minutes, always addressed to me. Richards had a slight feeling of guilt for having left Scotland where he was liked, happy and content; his love for his chosen country was originated by no dislike of the old one. He did not tolerate even the slightest and best intentioned critical remark against Britain. But Major Sim was bursting with abuse in the old-fashioned, Blimpish way. Britain was going to the dogs, the present government was a bunch of inefficient muddlers, the country was bankrupt, but he was pleased to see that, etc., etc. I gave up in despair. I sat there for half an hour speechlessly, watching the ceaseless and merciless deluge. Then I hit upon an idea. I knew that in spite of the wide social, political and ideological gulf between my two companions, they were true Britishers and there was one theme which would restore peace and happiness between them. I declared:

“What a nasty day.”

Richards nodded.

“Dreadful, isn’t it?”

Major Sim murmured:

“It’s rather wet, I must say.”

I spoke again:

“I’ve never seen anything like it. Except perhaps two years ago in Dorset. . . .”

They looked at me. They looked at each other. Their

SHORT LESSON FOR TRAVELLERS

eyes lit up. They both got animated. We started discussing rains in Dorset, the Midlands and Renfrewshire; great rains of the past in India and Hungary as well as future rains in Israel; rains of all ages and all Continents; rains in the democracies and rains behind the Iron Curtain. When the rain stopped at half-past two at dawn, we all parted as lifelong friends. We almost wept on each other's bosoms and I observed, in fact, a large round tear in Major Sim's eye when he shook hands with Richards. In the end, I am quite sure, he became converted to Zionism. It was a memorable and extremely pleasant day.

But still, I gather, the Acropolis is not too bad, either.

PART FOUR

Scraps of Autobiography

DYBWAD

DYBWAD was the name of the Norwegian I murdered.
It happened in 1940.

* * *

About three years ago I arrived at Northolt airport from Prague. In the coach, taking us from the airport to the terminal, I was sitting next to the driver and a bearded gentleman was sitting next to me. He asked the driver whether he could stop about half-way, just for a minute, as he wanted to get out. The driver replied that he was not allowed to stop. "It's quite maddening," my neighbour complained. "The bus will pass right in front of my door, but I have to drive on for another twenty minutes, take a taxi, spend a lot of money and lose about an hour." The driver shrugged his shoulders. "I'm sorry, Sir. We are strictly forbidden to stop on our way." A short and dramatic pause followed. The driver added: "But it *is* amazing what a chap would do for a shilling or two."

Well, this is human nature. A chap would go to some length for a little money. The driver did stop for half a crown; and I murdered a Norwegian for twelve guineas.

* * *

I hasten to add, in fairness to myself, that there were no nasty motives involved in the crime. No jealousy, hatred, revenge or any other revolting passion. I did it for money.

And in 1940 I needed money badly. I had just stopped receiving my salary, as a London correspondent, from

Budapest, and I had only my meagre savings to live on. This state of affairs did not worry me unduly. I was leading a frugal life, spending very little, but I must admit that every now and then it occurred to me that it was not enough to be careful with my savings—a little income, too, might come in handy.

Then, a few days after the invasion of Norway, a friend of mine, a writer, rang me up. He asked me to collaborate with him on a small, sixpenny book, which had to be written in a great hurry.

"What is it about?" I enquired.

"It is about a Norwegian patriot," he explained, "who actually saw the Germans in Oslo, but succeeded in escaping at the last moment to this country."

"I see," said I. "And we have to interview him and put down the interview in book form."

"That's the idea," my friend agreed. "I have signed the contract, we are to receive twenty-four guineas, between us, for the job. Everything is all right—except for one slight hitch."

"Yes," said I.

"The only trouble is that I can't lay my hands on any Norwegian patriot. In fact, I don't know any Norwegians at all."

"That seems to be rather unfortunate," I remarked brightly. "That means, of course . . ."

"That means," he continued calmly, "that you have to supply the Norwegian. I've got the contract; you'll get the Norwegian. It would be only a fair distribution of the work."

I told my friend that in my present position I was short of many things. Among other necessities of life, I was short of Norwegians, too. But the problem had to be solved and I am ashamed to confess that it *was* solved.



I did it for money

DYBWAD

I sailed out to the newspaper library of the British Museum and copied out of the *Daily Telegraph* all the news items which had appeared about Norway since the outbreak of the war.

Then the problem of our hero's name had to be solved. Later on there were many Norwegians in London; but not at that time. I had to ask about two dozen people whether they knew any Norwegians. I found one who knew a Norwegian whose Christian name was Ejnar; and another whose surname was Dybwad. So I concocted a Norwegian whose name was Ejnar Dybwad.

If murder is a nasty affair because it interferes with the natural course of a man's life and with God's will, then the reverse of killing, i.e. creating a man, cannot be any better. That poor, defenceless and innocent Norwegian patriot, Ejnar Dybwad, who had not done me any harm, was duly created and disguised as a real person. I wrote the story in the first person singular, in Dybwad's name. All Dybwad's views were identical with the views of the *Daily Telegraph*.

Naturally, the story was heroic and romantic. It tried to do full justice to Norway and treated her suffering with sympathy and understanding. Quite naturally, it was also utter rubbish. Still, it was a shade better than it ought to have been. Our publisher—who received the manuscript almost page by page—was delighted and impressed, and at the end of the penultimate chapter expressed his wish to meet Dybwad personally.

One crime leads to another. I had no way out. I murdered the man without more ado and threw his corpse in the sea. I added a postscript in the name of one of Dybwad's friends and, in turn, sent him back to Norway, to fight for King and Country.

* * *

The book was sold out in a week. But I have no illusions about the gravity of my crime. I hope posterity will forget me and God and Norway may forgive. As far as I know, this is the only major crime—literary or otherwise—I have ever committed. *But it weighs heavily on my conscience and may have had a great part in corrupting my character.* “For if once,” said de Quincey, “a man indulges himself in murder, very soon he comes to think little of robbing, and from robbing he comes next to drinking and Sabbath-breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination. Once begin upon this downward path, you never know where you are to stop. Many a man dated his ruin from some murder or other that perhaps he thought little of at the time.” So I’d better be careful.

THE DUKE

A FEW weeks after I had arrived in England—a year before the war—I decided to buy a car. This was rather a bold decision as I had no money, but I worked as London correspondent for two big continental newspapers and needed a car badly.

I remembered having seen a huge advertisement somewhere in North London: BIGGEST STORE FOR NEW AND SECOND-HAND CARS! WE HAVE CARS OF ALL DESCRIPTIONS. YOU WILL FIND YOUR CAR HERE!

I asked a friend of mine to take me to the place in his car. He had a large, very elegant, black American automobile; it was as big as a locomotive and moved as silently as a prima-ballerina on tip-toe. We made an extremely impressive appearance. The car dealer was engaged in showing a mild little man round the showroom, but he immediately called one of his assistants, left him to deal with the customer, and walked over to us.

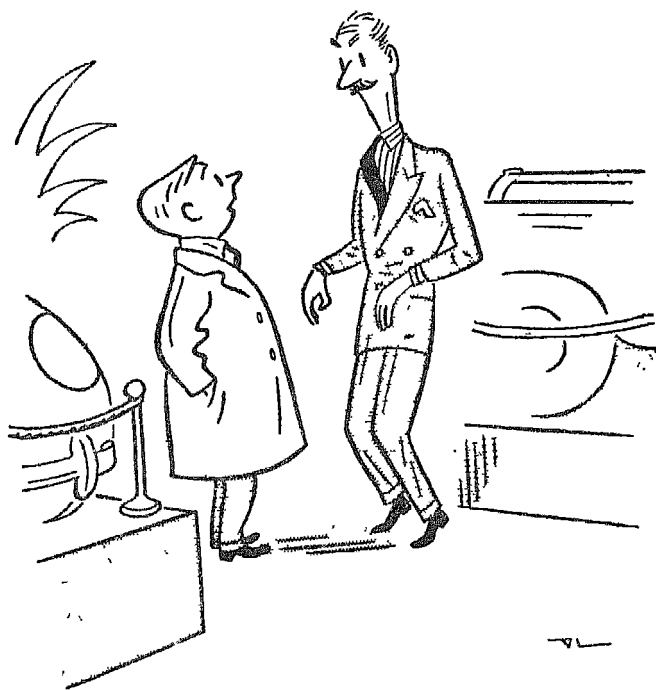
“I want a car,” I told him.

“Do look around, sir,” he answered politely. “This is the latest Packard, I can highly recommend it.”

The car was a beauty. Next to it my friend’s marvelous vehicle looked almost like a second-hand bicycle.

I asked a few questions, made some rather scornful remarks about it and then asked the price. It was something around two thousand pounds. I told him that the car was not *quite* what I wanted, and that the price was too high for me in any case. He showed me cheaper and cheaper cars. American cars for a thousand pounds, large English cars for six hundred, small English cars for

New & Used



£2

THE DUKE

two hundred. Gradually we came down to the second-hand cars at prices between twenty and thirty pounds.

"I am afraid that is still much too much," I told him.

He grew slightly impatient.

"Well, sir," he asked me haughtily, "how much do you want to spend, approximately?"

"Two pounds," I told him. He looked a little surprised.

"Approximately?" he enquired.

"Approximately," I nodded. "Two pounds being the limit."

A little pause followed.

"I am exceedingly sorry, sir," the car dealer remarked pompously, "that I took you at all seriously."

"I think it is rather for me to say that," I replied rather hurt.

"For you?" he asked.

"Yes, for me. Have you not put up extravagant and swaggering posters saying that you have cars of *all* descriptions?"

I pointed to the poster.

"'You will find *your* car here.' That's what you said. Well, I'm sorry, but I cannot find *my* car here. And I cannot help feeling—forgive me for being quite frank—I cannot help feeling that you have let me down."

He could hardly speak.

"Let you down, you said?"

"Yes, let me down."

He stood silent for a moment. Then he turned to me.

"Very well, sir, I won't let you down. Come this way."

We proceeded to a courtyard full of rubbish, laid-up cars, rusty spare parts and dust. In a corner I saw a

THE DUKE

small object on four wheels, which after thorough scrutiny, definitely resembled a car. It was shabby and of no particular colour, although you could see that it had once been brown; one of the wings was badly damaged and the left running board was missing altogether; two of its tyres were flat, one of the windows broken, and inside and outside was a thick layer of dust.

"Here you are, sir," the dealer announced. "*Your* car."

I looked at it closely and the more I examined it, the less I liked it. I frowned.

"Is this a good car?" I asked the dealer sternly.

"A very neat little vehicle for the price," he murmured vaguely.

"Does it run?"

He shook his head. "No, it doesn't."

"Well, that's rather a drawback, isn't it? What's wrong with it?"

"Practically everything." Then he asked me:

"Do you want to use it for travelling?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, do you want to go from one place to another in it, as people do with cars?"

"I can't very well use it for decoration, can I?"

He gave me this point and promised me that within a week's time the car would be in running order.

"What's the price of the vehicle?" I asked him.

"Two pounds."

"Don't you think that's rather a lot?"

"I can show you another one which costs only one pound."

"No, I'll take it," I said quickly.

"Maybe you'd like me to arrange for payment by instalments?" the man asked.

THE DUKE

"No, I'll pay cash," I answered, not without a certain pride.

* * *

At home I asked Mrs. Parsons, the housekeeper, to clean out the garage and give me the key.

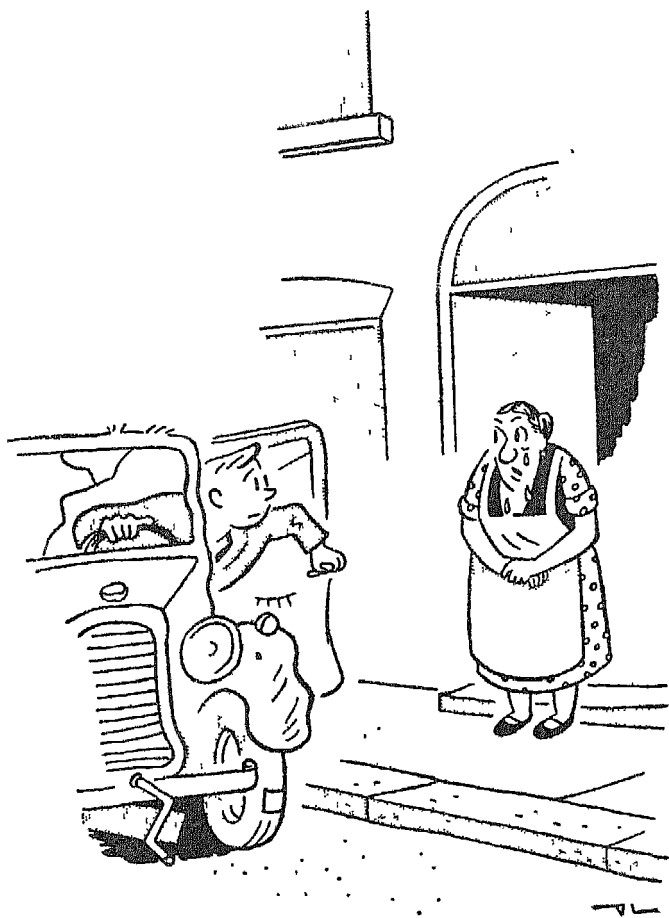
"I've bought a car," I told her casually. She was duly impressed and asked me, twice every day, when the car would arrive. She cleaned out the garage beautifully, bought some brown polish for me—as I told her it *had been* brown—and arranged with a man next door to come and wash it every Wednesday morning.

This was at the time when the first Czechoslovak crisis was growing more and more threatening; guns were installed in the London parks, gas-masks were being distributed to everyone, and war seemed very near. We journalists had to rush around from dawn to dusk, so I rang up my car dealer, urging him to hurry up with the repairs. After five days he rang me up and announced that the car was ready and I could call for it. I did.

The engine, to my great amazement, started. It is true that it made an appalling noise, but I was quite pleased to hear it. I put my foot on the accelerator and my car started moving slowly. I paid my two pounds and drove proudly away.

There was trouble at the first hill. The motor had been a bit noisy from the start, but as soon as I reached the hill the sound became deafening. It sounded like the Battle of Waterloo in a thunderstorm. People looked at me with fear and astonishment; with horror and disgust; with amusement and indignation. I tried to look unconcerned and drove on.

Then suddenly the door of a house opened and out rushed two elderly ladies and three men.



"Take it back, Sir . . ."

THE DUKE

"I told you you can't trust the Germans!" one of the men shouted excitedly. The two ladies put their gas-masks on. In a few seconds the whole family disappeared into the nearest air raid shelter.

* * *

Mrs. Parsons hurried out to greet me as I arrived home. She caught a glimpse of my car and stopped dead. She stood there stock still in front of the house, looked at me, looked at the car, then looked at me again, then shook her head; tears were running down her cheeks.

"Take it back, sir," she said at last.

I was shocked.

"What do you mean, take it back?"

"Take it back where you got it from," she repeated.

"A gentleman cannot use a car like that."

"A car doesn't make a gentleman," I retorted angrily.

"Anyway, I never said I was a gentleman."

I saw that she was really upset, so I added a few words of consolation.

"You must not yet make your final judgment, Mrs. Parsons. She will improve."

"Improve?"

"Yes, improve. I shall treat her well, keep her nice and clean, I may have her repainted, I shall spend money on her, and one day . . . well, one day, you just won't recognise her."

"A nice day that will be," she said as she turned and left me.

The registration number of the car was DUK 305. At first my friends called her "Ducky", after the three letters, but later they decided that "Duke" was a more fitting name.

So Duke and I started upon our rather stormy career.

THE DUKE

We became inseparable, but I had to learn a few tricks about her.

My best friend lived in Fitzjohn's Avenue, but now our relations became rather strained; I had to give up visiting him because Duke refused to take the hill. Later I found out that she could take small hills if I drove her backwards. Policemen looked at me queerly, and other drivers seemed far from pleased at seeing a car turn and go as though it were coming. They were always afraid the Duke would suddenly start rolling backwards. Once, a lieutenant-colonel, driving a large Bentley, asked me whether I had trouble with my brakes.

"On the contrary, sir," I told him, "I have no brakes."

"You're joking," he said, "how can you stop then?"

"Oh, she stops very well without brakes," I assured him. "Stopping's no worry. The problem is how to start."

The Duke's second peculiarity was that she used about twice as much petrol as the largest Rolls Royce; old cars always use more petrol than new ones, but the main reason for it was the sad fact that my petrol tank had a tiny hole in it which could not be mended.

The third trouble was that the noise—unbearable from the outset—became worse every day. For the time being the political crisis had blown over, so people no longer took my car for an air raid; all the same they still did not like it.

The fourth difficulty was that the Duke issued such clouds of smoke that I was permanently hidden by a smoke-screen—but this also had its advantages because, from certain angles, people couldn't see me.

The fifth nuisance was that the starter went wrong, and after a week or two I also lost the handle. So the only

THE DUKE

possible way to start the Duke was to put her in gear, give her a push, and when the motor started, jump in and drive away. Luckily the car was so light that I could push it with the greatest of ease. At the beginning it happened occasionally that the Duke ran faster than I did and I experienced some difficulty in catching up with her. But later I learnt to do my jumping in with acrobatic skill and not infrequently I was warmly applauded by the passers-by.

I must admit that whenever I left a smart hotel or a diplomatic reception and had to drive out amongst the most superb and magnificent cars, thundering like a cannon and pouring out black smoke, after pushing the Duke and jumping in (to the great amazement of the distinguished gathering) most of the porters wept with shame.

I must also add that Mrs. Parsons was inconsolable. My car was the talk of the street; her colleagues made withering remarks and two of the tenants asked her to come up and warn them whenever I was about to start off in my car, because if the uproarious noise burst upon them too suddenly it was bad for their nerves. I readily complied with their wishes and even promised to ring up a few minutes before coming home so as to warn them also of my impending arrival. They were most grateful for my courtesy.

I avoided Mrs. Parsons whenever I could and dared not look her in the eyes. And I kept on repeating:

"Don't lose heart, Mrs. Parsons . . . she will improve one day. . . ."

* * *

Three months later I decided to go to Scotland with a friend. He offered to book the tickets, but I informed

THE DUKE

him that no tickets would be necessary as we would go by car.

He turned as white as a sheet. "By car?" he asked. "Do you mean the Duke?"

"I mean the Duke."

"I am not going," he announced, "not with the Duke. She will blow up."

"She hasn't blown up yet."

"She will one day. Besides, I am Scottish myself and I consider it an outrage against my country, to take the Duke over the border."

A long argument followed. In the end he gave in. "All right, I'll go. After all, one can't live for ever."

He took out a life insurance for a very high sum and *the next morning we left.*

* * *

It was a slow journey because the Duke moved with a *certain stolid dignity* and refused to exceed thirty miles an hour. But we reached Scotland eventually and did not blow up on the way. We stayed in the picturesque and peaceful village of Kipford, on the Solway Firth. It was a tiny place, with only a few hundred inhabitants, mostly fishermen; it was very quiet there with a poetic, almost solemn, silence. This poetic, almost solemn, silence was periodically broken by the Duke, moving across the one and only street of the village.

After a fortnight's rest, we packed up and left for home. Outside the village, in a lovely and desolate spot, we were stopped by a man standing by a large green and cream Rolls Royce. He explained that his battery was as flat as a pancake and he couldn't start. Would I kindly give him a push with my car? He looked at the Duke with some suspicion and added that he wouldn't

THE DUKE

have bothered us if there had been other cars on the road.

"I am always pleased to help any fellow-motorist in trouble," I assured him with a haughty air.

He got into his car, I moved the Duke behind him and gave him a push. His motor started in two seconds and slowly the car began to move. At this moment the Duke blew up. When I say blew up, I mean blew up. There was a terrific explosion and we found ourselves sitting on the road enveloped in a huge cloud of smoke. When it cleared away we saw that the Duke had broken in two; the front half lay in the ditch and the other half rested peacefully on the road.

The man in the Rolls Royce stopped and turned round.

"Does your car do this often? "

"Very rarely," I said, "in fact this is the first time."

"What are you going to do with it? "

"Leave it."

"Leave it? Where? "

"Here! I'll push the back part into the ditch as well, and leave it. It was a very good little car, but I'm quite glad to get rid of her. I don't like using the same car too long, do you? "

"Well, I'm going to use this one for another fifteen years and then I'll see."

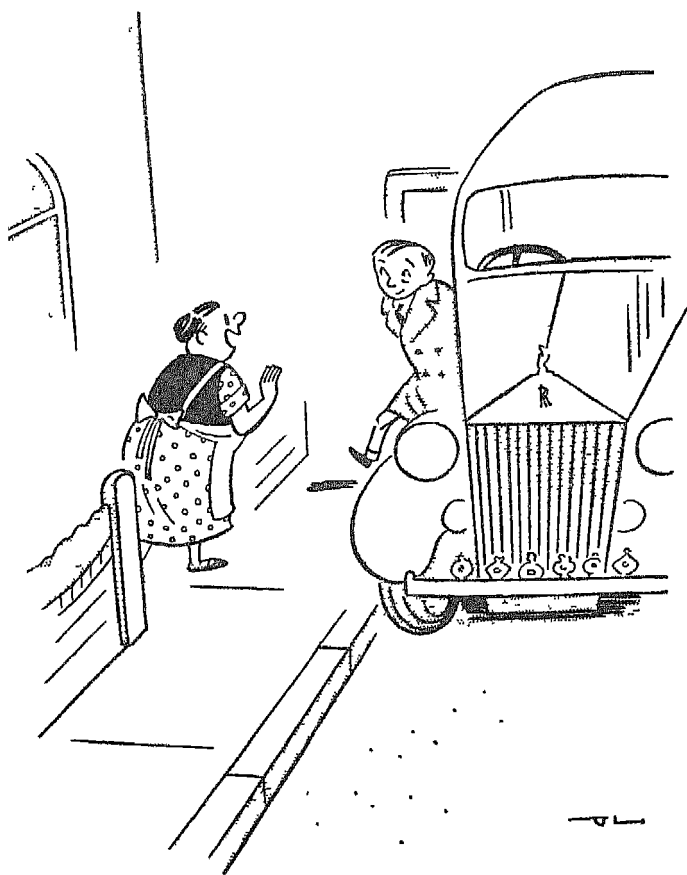
"Where are you going? "

"To London."

"Can you take us? "

"Jump in."

We cleared away the wreckage of the Duke and put our luggage in the Rolls. That night we stayed somewhere in the Lake District and the next day we arrived back in London. By this time we had become very friendly with the owner of the Rolls. He had no time to



"It has changed . . ."

THE DUKE

take us home himself, but lent us his car to take our suitcases back.

"But bring it back, please," he said. "And if it explodes don't leave it in the ditch."

"Don't worry, if it explodes I'll give you a ring."

In a quarter of an hour we arrived home. Mrs. Parsons stood in front of the house. She looked at the lovely green and cream Rolls Royce carefully and then nodded in approval.

"That's better . . . she certainly *has* improved."

